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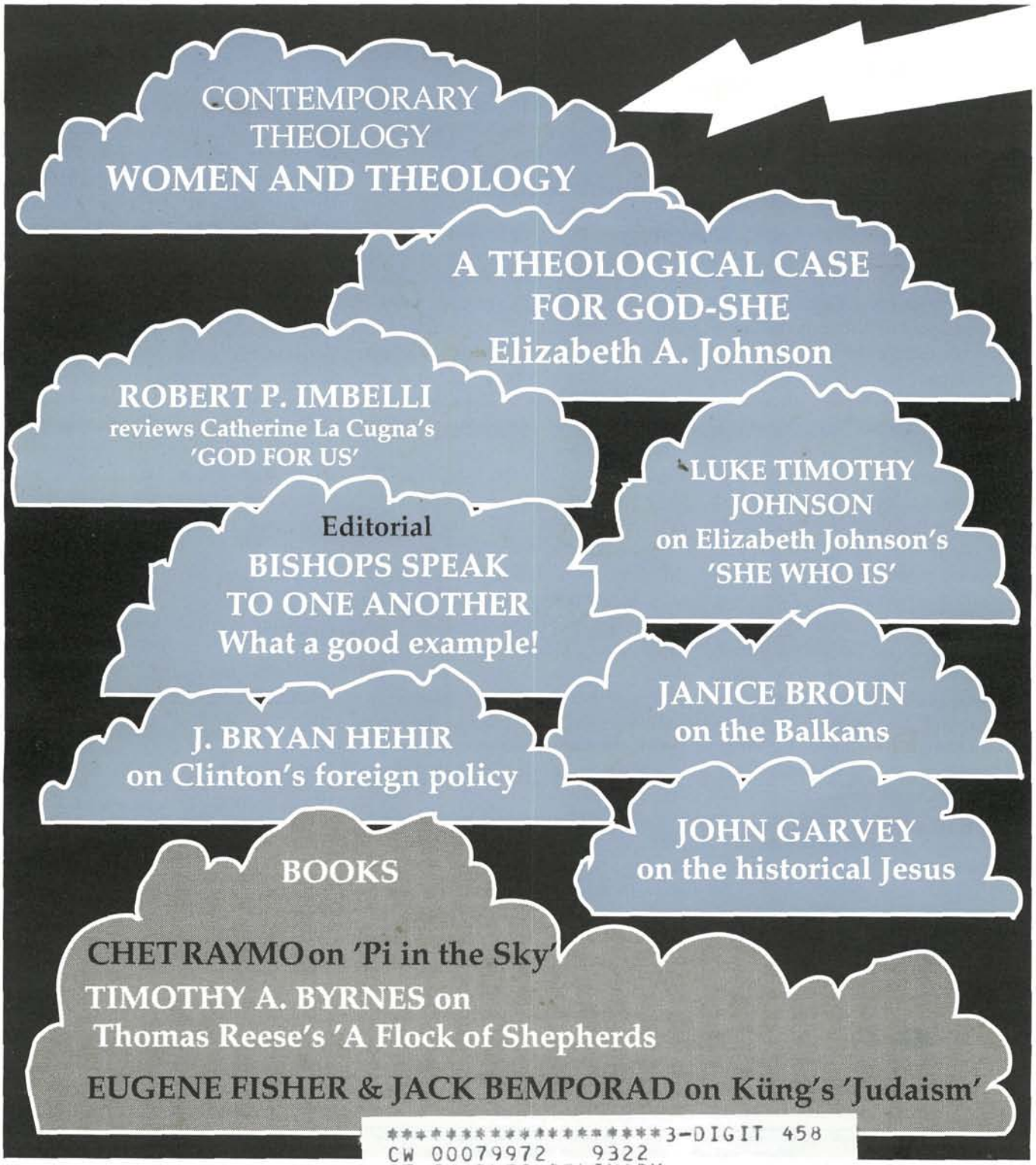


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# CORRESPONDENCE

## Anything you can do...

Cold Spring Harbor, N.Y.

*To the Editors:* I chuckled when I read this sentence in Paul Baumann's article "Fetal Positions" [December 4, 1992]:

> [David] Noble suggests that the Western rationalistic quest for technical mastery of nature has been driven for 1,000 years not by "men playing God" but "[it can] more appropriately be described as men playing women."

In the ecclesiastical area, where men desire to be masterful in spiritual ways, the exact same thing has been going on for even longer than those 1,000 years.

*Vide*: the priest dresses himself in what can only be described as feminine fashion—skirts, stoles, laces, embroidery, hats—and stands at a table where he prepares, with his servants, a meal of bread to eat and wine to drink, served in beautiful crystal and shining silver receptacles, on linen of the fairest kind; he then invites his guests to come and partake of the nice feast he's fixed, and feeds them as a mother feeds her infants; then he and his minions wash up, put away the leftovers for another occasion, and everyone goes home satisfied.

With little effort you can see that all other pastoral, magisterial, managerial priestly activities are borrowed from the distaff side, too. Just think "mother" and you've got a good job description of a priest.

I contemplate how interesting this is, and a segué thought immediately forms: When is the church going to realize that if men can do these womanly things pretty well, then women are surely qualified to do them, too? SALLY CAMPBELL

## The author replies:

I think Ms. Campbell is confusing venerable male and courtly dress with "feminine fashion." Somewhere Chesterton comments on how silly trousers are compared to the free-flowing robes of antiquity.

But she is partly right about the sexual and gender role paradoxes of the priesthood. It is a good thing, as far as I'm concerned, to have males who preside at the table feeding their guests "as a mother feeds her infants." Good for them, and good for those locked into rigid notions of gender roles or equally rigid notions about the symbolic irrelevance of gender. Ordaining women would, of course, dispense with these paradoxes by making them arbitrary. Better to require men to play mother. PAUL BAUMANN

## Dubious tactics

North Easton, Mass.

*To the Editors:* Re: Cecil M. Robeck's letter, "What the pope said" [Correspondence, December 18]: The Conference of European Churches distinguishes between "authentic evangelism" and "destructive proselytism." I believe Pope John Paul II was referring to the latter when he singled out the tactics of most foreign Evangelical and Pentecostal missionaries in Latin America, alluding to them as "rapacious wolves."

There is nothing wrong with an evangelization that enables Catholics to receive "adequate feeding from the church." But to flood nominal Catholics, most of whom are poor, with programs that exploit their weaknesses, that encourage them to distance themselves from public service, and, in the very recent past, support repressive governments, is "destructive proselytism" and its Evangelical and Pentecostal agents are indeed "rapacious wolves." One can well imagine the outcry in Protestant circles if American and South African Catholics aligned themselves with the repressive government of Pretoria in order to bring a "Catholic Holy Spirit" to nominally Protestant South Africans!

As for Robeck's claims that "the pope's solution is precisely what Pentecostals and Evangelicals have advocated throughout this century," I can only urge readers to look at the documents of Medellin and most Pentecostal tracts and judge for themselves whether this is so.

JAMES CHICHETTO, C.S.C.

*From the editors*: For fuller understanding of this exchange, readers are referred to the article that occasioned it: "John Paul Cries Wolf," by Edward L. Cleary, O.P., November 20, 1992.

## An unnecessary quarrel

Piedmont, Calif.

*To the Editors:* John Garvey's column, "Community Is Not an Aggregate" [October 23] subtly but actively falls back on the denigration of nontraditional families as a means of promoting the continued dominant status of what has long been regarded as the model of civil and Christian perpetuity. Like so many, he takes an either/or approach to the question, rather than the both/and view.

Why such a lack of faith in the traditional family? Is this structure so fragile that the *simple existence* of single-parent, same-sex-parent, and extended family structures must inevitably destroy it?

If the ideal family unit is one that provides a special sense of belonging and that nurtures loving, stable, and productive people, then that kind of atmosphere should be embraced wherever it is found. To say this is not to deprecate Garvey's ideal family structure of mother, father, and children. Surely any caring and devoted family "community" is one blessed by God and worthy of respect and encouragement. JIM McCREA

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COMMONWEAL

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# Hear this

For many Catholics, Archbishop Rembert G. Weakland and Cardinal John J. O'Connor seem to represent two poles within the American church. For partisan supporters of each, the church is divided between the forces of misguided reform in Milwaukee and traditionalist retrenchment in New York. But while the divergence is real, it is too often exaggerated. Equally real, as a recent public exchange between the two shows, is the fact that the combined perspectives of both are stronger than the isolated virtues of either.

Weakland caught O'Connor's attention with an op-ed piece in the *New York Times* (December 2, 1992) in which Weakland criticized the church's views on women, and urged continued discussion about the exclusion of women from the priesthood. O'Connor responded in a fraternal fashion in *Catholic New York* (December 10) but disputed several of Weakland's conclusions. Weakland rejoined in the *Catholic Herald* (December 31). The characteristic qualities of each man were evident in the essays. Weakland's *Times* piece was provocative, confident, forthright, and tinged with a note of embattled grievance. O'Connor's column was civil, cautious, forthright, and touched with a certain theatrical humility. In other words, strong and cagy personalities were marshaling their most persuasive arguments and personas. The area of agreement between the two was broad, especially about the openness of the church to the world. Responding to Weakland's suggestion that women serve in nonpriestly roles in the Vatican curia and diplomatic corps, O'Connor raised practical and canonical difficulties. But, he conceded, "the questions surely merit exploration...the status quo is never sufficient justification for its own continuance." At the same time O'Connor expressed some skepticism of Weakland's optimistic embrace of secular intellectual categories that are themselves suffering a crisis of legitimation. Excluding women from the priesthood does not presuppose any inferiority but is an expression of gender difference, O'Connor maintained, going on to warn that continued debate on the subject would create "unfulfillable expectations."

Putting the status of women in the church in context, O'Connor offered a useful reminder of the church's hierarchical and apostolic nature. Unfortunately, his resistance to expanding authority outside the priesthood verged on the legalistic. Historically, juridical power has not been restricted to the clergy, and scriptural impediments are slight.

The ordination of women is a more difficult question than either its most righteous proponents admit or Rome's appeal to precedent and obedience allows. We need better answers about the symbolic significance of sexual differentiation and its pertinence to priestly identity. Ironically, O'Connor's response demonstrates how shortsighted it is to curtail faithful deliberation on these questions. Catholics have much to talk about; most welcome an honest and fair-minded contestation of views between bishops. It sets a good example.



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# WORSE YET TO COME?

## KOSOVO & MACEDONIA

What happened in Bosnia-Herzegovina must never be allowed to happen again. It would be catastrophic if something similar were to spread to the province of Kosovo and to adjacent Macedonia. All that Bosnia represented—a vibrant, contented, mutually tolerant multicultural and religious society—has been swept away in a cataclysm of carnage, ethnic cleansing, and mass rape. Europe's leaders are at long last getting the message that what Bosnia suffered was not war, but cold and calculated invasion, a message they should have gotten from the example of the bloodbath Serbia created previously in Croatia. Instead, they allowed Serbia to rip Bosnia apart.

Now these leaders have precious little leverage over Kosovo, since for Serbia, Kosovo is a purely internal affair, irrespective of the fact that it is 92 percent ethnic Albanian. Serbia regards any intervention from outside forces as an act of war. Kosovo is their most treasured possession, spoken of in biblical terms as their Jerusalem, the cradle of their nation.

Only the Kosovan Albanian leaders' almost saintly forbearance, tolerance, and willingness to seek dialogue, and the general awareness that the fate of a rebellious Kosovo would be even worse than Bosnia's, have prevented an uprising so far. Most observers do not expect Kosovans to remain quiescent much longer.

Former Serb Prime Minister Milan Panic's visit to Kosovo last October, the first ever attempt at dialogue from the Serb government, could have provided a breakthrough had he and his initiative not been repudiated and denounced by the ruling Socialist party and its powerful ally, the nationalist Serbian Radical party. Panic was ousted in late December. He had offered Ibrahim Rugova, head of the Kosovan Albanian Democratic Alliance (DSK), three seats in the federal cabinet. Both had agreed that Albanian elementary schools, closed for a year as the result of an Albanian boycott against the suppression of the Albanian language as a medium of instruction, be reopened. But even Panic, though willing to discuss the restoration of Kosovan autonomy (revoked unilaterally by Serbia in 1989), had drawn the line at independence.

Rugova maintains that only the presence of UN observers can avert violence. He favors a neutral, independent, democratic, demilitarized republic with guaranteed rights to protect Serbs and their monastic shrines. (Some of these, have, ironically, been guarded for centuries by Albanian Muslims.) To most Serbs, surrender of Kosovo would be craven betrayal, though the Orthodox Christian Vuk Draskovic of the Serb Renewal party, in a surprise *volte face*, suggested partition, leaving Serbia with the north where most of the monasteries are located.

Serb extremists, exploiting Kosovo as a major issue in December's national election, had a clear run there because a million Kosovan Albanian voters boycotted the elections. The Albanians, with their self-proclaimed "Kacanicka Constitution" (*see* "The Next Explosion," *Commonweal*, July 17,1992) have demonstrated since 1990 their ability to create an alternative civil society, and can see no possible future for themselves within a paranoically nationalist Serbia. The Serbian elections confirmed the supremacy of the extreme nationalists. The Serbian Radical party, whose leader Vojislav Seselj is accused of war crimes by the United States, won a quarter of the seats. Zeljko Raznatovic, alias Arkan, another of those accused of atrocities, utilized Kosovo as a launching pad for his political career with the rallying cry, "Drive Albanians back to their homeland, Albania! Serb mothers, bear more children!" Already, Serb refugee families are being resettled in Kosovo. The foundations of a Serbian Orthodox cathedral have been laid on the campus of Pristina University, originally founded for Albanians but now an almost entirely Serbian institution, prompting the DSK to protest strongly that the church is placing itself at the service of Serb policy.

Ethnic cleansing in Kosovo is not a new policy. Serbia experimented with it back in 1912. Then, in 1937, an ambitious scheme drawn up by Serb-dominated Yugoslavia collapsed only because of World War II, when Kosovo and Albania were briefly united under Italian rule.

With regard to Macedonia, on the other hand, the European Community (EC) could have exerted leverage. As far as the Serbs are concerned, Macedonia is dispensable, though according to Seselj, Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic's alter ego, Serbia favors carving it up with Greece and Albania.

The EC's prime concern should have been to stabilize Macedonia's new, impoverished, fragile democracy. But whereas Serbia, or at least Panic, recognized Macedonia in October, the EC consigned it to a kind of limbo, allowing itself to be dictated to by Greece, the most blatant defaulter over the trade embargo imposed on Serbia, and the EC has continued to withhold proper recognition. Greece, whose fixation with its past compares with Serbia's, claims proprietary rights to the name Macedonia on (dubious) historical grounds. But the Macedonians too identify themselves with a name which distinguishes them against past encroachments from Serbs, Greeks, and Bulgarians. While Macedonian President Kiro Gligorov staked his government's positions on an unpopular compromise, "Macedonia-Skopje," Greece, with the aid of frenzied demonstrations in Athens, convinced the Edinburgh EC Conference last December that concessions on its side could topple Greece's government, and even threatened to cease applying any sanctions against Serbia.

The EC ignored Gligorov's warning that nonrecognition, blockades, and lack of help from abroad all increase ethnic and social tensions. Slav Macedonians and the Albanian minority, a third of the population, have become increasingly polarized. It is now far more difficult to work out a satisfactory *modus vivendi* for the ethnic Albanians, who suffered considerable disadvantages under communism, especially in education. Their



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community is split between accepting the cabinet representation and boycotting participation in politics. Rational dialogue is giving way to heated accusations. In November four people died in riots in Skopje. The Islamic community council severed relations with the Macedonian Orthodox church following the erection of crosses in mainly Muslim towns. While the new Macedonian constitution recognizes as citizens only people who have lived in the republic for fifteen years, thousands more refugees are now arriving in Macedonia: Albanians fleeing grinding poverty in adjacent Albania or oppression in Kosovo, and Slav Muslims fleeing Bosnia. Christians in Prilep threatened a blockade to prevent Bosnian Muslims from settling locally.

Extremist, potentially violent Albanian irridentism is spreading, demanding the unification of all Balkan Albanians—whether from Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, the Serbian Sandjack region, or Albania—into one state. In Albania itself the militantly anti-Communist Balli Kombetar, crushed during World War II by Enver Hoxha, has come to life again. The organization is demanding the return of Kosovo and jeopardizing the Albanian government's attempts to prevent a clash with Serbia, being only too aware of its own military weakness.

The Macedonian government feels itself the victim of forces beyond its control. Its greatest fear is war in Kosovo. Should this happen, 2 million Albanians could spill over into Macedonia and Albania and bring the total of unwanted European refugees to nearly 5 million. Greece's NATO troops, at the ready along its mountainous northern border to repel a fictive Macedonian invasion, will keep refugees out and might slice off Epirus, southern Albania.

Other powers should not stand idly by. Turkey, the most stabilizing power in the Balkans, is ready to intervene militarily to protect its Muslims. That could bring it into a collision course with Serbia, fellow NATO power Greece, and even, if Yeltsin fell, Russia. Bulgaria, Macedonia's other neighbor, would probably try to avoid involvement. The United States now looks likely to intervene. If there is a major Balkan war, the EC must bear much of the blame. JANICE BROUN

*Janice Broun, formerly Eastern European correspondent for News Network International, writes frequently on the Balkans for* Commonweal.

**WORLD WATCH**

J. Bryan Hehir

# CLINTON ON THE WORLD STAGE

## SOME CLUES TO HIS PERSPECTIVE

The presidential campaign was strikingly devoid of foreign policy debate; the public showed little interest and the candidates obliged them. Hence, as we approach the inauguration of Bill Clinton, both the nation and the world know less about his approach to foreign policy than would normally be the case. In trying to assess the direction a Clinton administration will follow there are three resources available: the global challenges the U.S. faces; the perspectives on foreign policy formed in the Clinton campaign; and the personnel chosen for the national security team.

When he did speak about foreign policy, Clinton began with the recognition that change is the order of the day in world affairs. He usually attributed the change to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the cold war. These events are undoubtedly the most visible and concrete expressions of the altered landscape of world politics, but they should be seen in tandem with a less dramatic but no less significant level of change at work in the life of states and nations. The end of the cold war yielded a change in the *structure of power* in the world. The bipolar order which stood at the heart of the cold-war conflict has been swept away. Beyond bipolarity there is a vigorous, unsettled debate about the pattern of power which is taking shape. The analysts debate unipolarity versus a return to multipolarity versus some more complex configuration (military bipolarity plus economic tripolarity and political multipolarity).

These speculations are fascinating, but they remain focused upon the distribution of power in the world. A second dimension of change—deeper and more elusive than the polarities of power—involves changing conceptions of the *basic principles* of international order. The two key ideas at stake here are sovereignty and nonintervention; these two ideas have served, not without criticism, as the basic principles of international relations for over three centuries. Today both the pressure of events and the power of ideas have eroded the status of sovereignty and nonintervention. In the 1990s and beyond, sovereignty will be challenged by external forces and by internal eruptions; the old idea of state sovereignty clashes today with both the logic of interdependence and claims of self-determination.

This double dimension of change—in both power and principles—is seldom addressed directly in foreign-policy planning. It is the background for more concrete issues which signal and exemplify the end of the cold war. The deeper changes must be understood and accounted for in policy planning, but most policies will address specific choices.

The changing structure of power, for example, has radically diminished the threat of nuclear war. But the end of the cold war may increase the likelihood of nuclear proliferation. The dissatisfaction with older



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ideas about sovereignty will create pressures for multiple forms of intervention to address ethnic conflict, human rights abuses, and the threat of proliferation. Increasing interdependence will heighten the role of economic policy as a component of foreign policy.

How will the Clinton administration respond? A review of his campaign speeches reveals a perspective on foreign policy, but not a detailed position on policies. If one deducts the normal use of campaign speeches to criticize one's opponent, three themes can be discerned in the Clinton perspective: the role of foreign policy; the relationship of moral values and political interests; the changing nature of danger in the world and consequently the need to restructure the U.S. military.

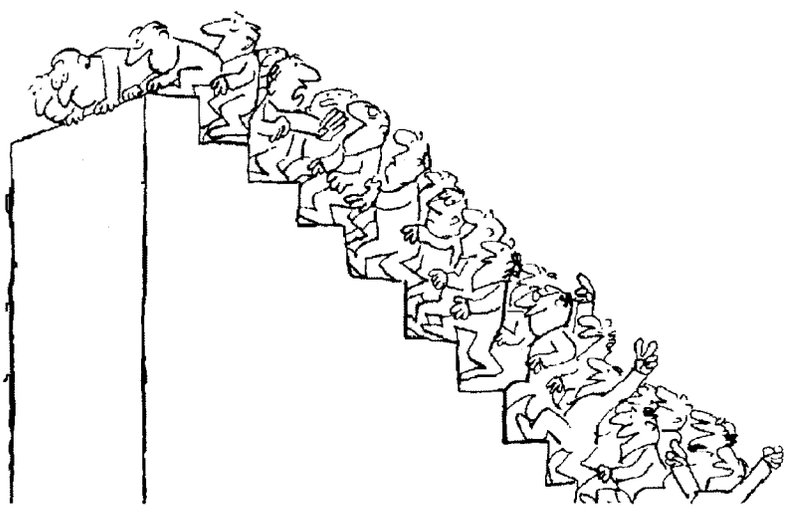
Bill Clinton ran against George Bush on domestic policy; there were several sound reasons for this strategy—the president was clearly vulnerable on economic issues, while his accomplishments lay in the international arena; Clinton, by experience and interest, was well versed in domestic social policy, and quite untested in the larger issues of foreign and defense policy. All of this could account for the priority which Clinton promised to give to U.S. economic problems and social policy, but it would be unfair to describe his position in these purely tactical terms. During the campaign, Clinton set forth an argument in principle about the relationship of domestic and foreign policy. While criticizing Bush's separation of these two realms and the consequent neglect of domestic policy, Clinton argued that the growing interdependence of the world and the rising saliency of economic issues required that foreign and domestic policy be seen as two sides of the same coin. His argument for linkage of these two domains was that some issues, like trade, could not be treated as purely foreign or domestic, *and* that the strength of the American economy was in fact a precondition for an effective foreign policy. Highlighting the "linkage factor" (how foreign policy issues quickly become an aspect of domestic politics) is not original, but the emphasis Clinton gave to it, and his creation of an "economic group" which, in fact, cuts across foreign and domestic issues, moved the theoretical conviction about linkage to a new level of importance. Clinton's basic perspective can fairly be described as giving priority to domestic policy, but he has resisted isolationist tendencies within and outside his own party, and he has established a foundation for innovation—conceptually and organizationally—for relating domestic and foreign affairs.

A refreshing aspect of Clinton's few foreign policy speeches was his willingness to relate moral values to issues of power and interest. The focal point of the argument was Clinton's support for democracy as a U.S. foreign policy objective. Here again, neither the theme of pressing democratic change nor the arguments made to support it were original with Clinton. The more interesting possibility is that the Clinton foreign policy team would be willing to engage the values-power-interest arguments across the spectrum of policy choices on security, economic, and human-rights issues. The substantive questions go beyond democracy as a policy objective, and they would require a more complex matrix for pursuing the moral arguments, but the potential for doing so is evident both in the Clinton speeches and in some personnel choices he has already made.

Before getting to the personnel questions, a final Clinton theme requires attention. Throughout the campaign he showed a clear awareness that a post-cold war world meant an era of different dangers, not a transition to a world without danger. In both his description of the military challenges the United States must confront, and his proposals to restructure U.S. forces (essentially relying on ideas of Sam Nunn and Les Aspin), Clinton put the spotlight on the right questions: "the risk of new threats from the former Soviet republics...the spread of weapons of mass destruction...and the growing intensity of ethnic, fundamentalist, and separatist violence." He then sketched two lines of response: first, a willingness to use multilateral institutions more extensively, with U.S. participation; and the need for internal restructuring of U.S. forces, stressing mobility, technological sophistication, and the need to pursue tactics which "reduce American and civilian casualties."

In all these areas—the role of foreign policy, the ethical foundation of policy, and the future function of military force—the Clinton campaign exhibited promising ideas and interests, but not a developed policy vision. His choice of people to fill out the vision provides some insight of what to expect from a Clinton foreign policy.

The national security team that Clinton named is well known to policy specialists, but relatively unknown to the general public. Warren Christopher, Les Aspin, Anthony Lake, Madeleine Albright, and Jim Woolsey have impressive executive- and legislative-branch experience; they also embody a Clinton campaign theme of seeking to draw together different sectors of the Democratic party. Because of their different backgrounds and (somewhat) different views, there is no single theme which will easily describe them. In spite of his lack of foreign-policy background, it is likely that Clinton himself will provide the direction for policy, if not





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its detailed articulation. No single member of the security group stands out as the defining figure.

If Clinton stays at the center, my guess is that the intellectual framework for policy debate will be set by Aspin and Lake. They bring different interests and different talents to policy formulation, but not clashing conceptions of the world. Aspin has systematically developed a view about reducing and restructuring the U.S. military, but he has proposed organizational change in light of an understanding of strategic changes in the world. Lake comes to the White House without the kind of overreaching policy position of a Kissinger or a Brzezinski, but with a great deal more of an intellectual and moral framework for strategy and policy than newspaper accounts have so far described. Lake has thought clearly and creatively about several of the problems of policy which were at the margins of the cold war debate, but fit the world emerging from the double change of structure and substance outlined above. Warren Christopher obviously has what every secretary of state needs: the abiding trust of the president and the respect of the other key players on the security team. Christopher may not generate the conceptual themes within the Clinton administration, but it certainly looks like his assessment of what is proposed and his careful judgment of how to proceed will carry great weight with an activist president.

All this is still speculative, but some things are clear: the lineaments of a different international order are already with us; a distinctive view of the role of foreign policy has been articulated; and a talented core of people has been assembled to fashion a policy for a changed and changing world. □

**OF SEVERAL MINDS** John Garvey

# THE CHRIST OF FAITH

## THIS IS NOT A HISTORY QUIZ

There has been a renewal of interest in the "historical Jesus" recently, much of it centered around the publication of John P. Meir's *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (Doubleday, 1991), and John Dominic Crossan's *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (HarperSan Francisco, 1991). There is an understandable fascination with the question: it is central to Christian teaching that a particular person, Jesus of Nazareth, was born and was killed at a specific time—"under Pontius Pilate," as the Nicene Creed makes a point of saying—and what is claimed for him by Christians is that he was God's Son, one with God, so that in seeing him we see the God who is, the Father who sent the Son and sends the Spirit to us.

To want to know more about this person historically is only natural for people who live at the end of the twentieth century. The "historical Jesus" is the one we can all try to agree about—Christians, Jews, agnostics—the one who existed historically, apart from the claims made about him, by himself (maybe or maybe not), by his first followers (probably), by later generations of Christians (certainly). A distinction has been made between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith.

People are threatened on both sides of this. The people who have problems with the Christ of faith are the more obviously troubled: they can't stand the Christian claim that someone has ended death's reign by enduring death and overcoming it, through a real resurrection his followers are encouraged to hope for. If this is true it changes the way our accustomed world of life and death must be regarded. There is no way around this. You accept it or you deny it. This "either/or" is not congenial to a certain sort of allegorical approach to the story of Jesus, which would rather see resurrection as a metaphor for any kind of desired recovery, or any form of enlightenment. Thomas Jefferson was among those who made Jesus relevant by removing from the Gospels anything which made Thomas Jefferson uncomfortable. (He did this, among other things, to make the gospel comprehensible to Indians, who—he seemed to know—would be better served by a deistic, Enlightenment-style Jesus, the moralistically inclined gentleman of Galilee.)

But there are believers who have a problem with the concern of those who care about the Jesus of history. We have been given "the Christ of faith" by an ongoing, living tradition, whereas "the Christ of history" is a secular concern, a worry for those who have rejected the belief in a presently living Christ from the start. Why bother yourself with this?

There are several good reasons. One is that research into the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Judaism that was current at the time of Jesus has revealed a much less monolithic Judaism than had been traditionally supposed; this alters some of the ways in which we have to read Paul and the Gospels. (John, for example, is not nearly so Hellenistic as many scholars had assumed.) Another is that such archaeological discoveries as the probability that the pool at Bethsaida at which Jesus cured a paralytic was a pagan, not a Jewish, healing shrine, can shift the ways in which we read the Gospel, and should: here we have a rabbi working a cure in a pagan place. These discoveries—entirely modern, totally historical—are important to biblical understanding. We know more about Jesus, and how to read the New Testament, when we know more about the world in which he lived, and the social and religious framework within which he worked.

But there is a most reasonable objection to at least some of the emphasis on the historical Jesus. That is the notion that we will know more about what really matters most about Jesus when we learn more *facts*. The emphasis on factual historical detail reads back a very modern con-



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cern into a past which, for important reasons, didn't regard the significance of a life as something one could discern by rummaging through biographical details; this would have seemed, to some of our ancestors, as unreasonable as looking for signs of the future in the entrails of sacrificially slaughtered pigeons.

There is something odd about the growth of the New Testament canon from a modern point of view. The earliest writings are Paul's, and the earliest of these is probably I Thessalonians. There are no details here about Jesus other than what is preached as a present reality: he died, rose, and is present, will save us from the wrath to come, and the dead in Christ will rise.

The earliest Jesus we encounter is the Jesus of faith. Only after a couple of generations of Christians do we find anything like "biographies" of Jesus, and they aren't histories in any modern sense. The sermon on the mountain in Matthew becomes a sermon on the plain in Luke, with significant differences; genealogies conflict; various accounts in the synoptic Gospels differ in what would, from a historical point of view, be important details; the Gospel of John has no Eucharist at the Last Supper, which is not a Passover meal in John; and so forth. These "contradictions" are routinely trotted out by people who imagine that they were never noticed by Christians. (The saddest spectacle is the fundamentalist attempt to reconcile what can't and was never meant to be reconciled here, a doomed effort which assumes the journalistic-historical approach to the Gospels to be the correct one.)

For the authors of the Gospels the questions to be answered were not "What did Jesus like for breakfast, and how tall were his relatives?" but "What did the life of this person mean for the world? What does his life mean for us?" The answers were addressed—from within a community which assumed the living presence of Jesus—to various audiences, and what we would consider important historical details (his ancestry, the place of his birth, where he preached and healed, how many were healed and under what circumstances, the direction of his sojourning in Galilee) are used and varied to make theological points, not to give biographical details. Jesus is the new Moses for Matthew, so his teaching must be given from a mountain.

Even the prejudice that makes the synoptic Gospels seem more "historical" than the Gospel of John, because they concur more and feel to us, at least since the early nineteenth century, more like what we call histories and biographies—even this is more a revelation of the limitations of our way of understanding a narrative than a sign that we might be closer there to what Jesus was "really like."

While it is true to say that there is no contradiction between the Jesus of history and the Jesus of faith, that isn't really the way to put the question. The Jesus of history is finally both real (no serious scholar doubts that Jesus was a real person) and probably, in the sense that modern people demand historical evidence, more or less inaccessible—certainly inaccessible if what is desired is independent verification of Gospel accounts. That doesn't exist. For that matter, there is only one reference to Israel in ancient Egyptian texts, and it is part of a list of defeated enemies. As in the case of Israel, the question isn't who or what can be proven to have existed historically, but how we are related to it.

The Christ of faith is the only Jesus who can finally matter to a believer. The earliest scriptural layer we have confronts us with the Jesus of faith; and later Scripture doesn't speak of history but of one who was crucified and whose tomb was empty, a way of returning later believers to Paul's earlier emphasis on Jesus' death and Resurrection. To the earliest Christians, and to us, the question was not, "what was he like historically," but the one Jesus put to his followers: "Who do you say that I am?" The gentlemanly Jesus, the great ethical teacher, the mystic who has everything in common with mystics of every age—this is not only not the Jesus of faith; it is not even the Jesus of history. This is the Jesus who leaves us more or less where we are, undisturbed. It is remarkable, if not at all surprising, how much Thomas Jefferson's Jesus resembles Thomas Jefferson. I like Blake on these contradictions: "The vision of Christ that thou dost see / Is my vision's greatest enemy.../ Thine is a friend to all mankind;/ Mine speaks parables to the blind." □



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# A THEOLOGICAL CASE FOR GOD-SHE

## EXPANDING THE TREASURY OF METAPHOR

ELIZABETH A. JOHNSON

A remarkable thing is happening in contemporary theology. God is moving back to the center of attention, accompanied by vigorous debate over the right way to speak about the divine mystery.

This situation is not entirely new. In the late fourth century Saint Gregory of Nyssa recorded how his contemporaries, high and low, seriously engaged the question of how to speak about God. Their issue, in a culture awash with Greek philosophical notions, was whether Jesus Christ was truly divine or simply a creature subordinate to God the Father. The question engaged not only theologians or bishops but just about everybody. "Even the baker," wrote Gregory, "does not cease from discussing this, for if you ask the price of bread he will tell you that the Father is greater and the Son subject to him."

In our day interest in how to address and speak about God is alive and well again thanks to a sizable company of bakers, namely, women who throughout history have borne responsibility for lighting the cooking fires and feeding the world. The women's movement in civil society and the church has spotlighted the exclusion of women from public discourse and decision making, and their resulting absence from the formation of cultural and theological symbols. This exclusion has had a decided effect on how we do—and do not—speak about God.

While theology has consistently acknowledged that God is Spirit, and thus beyond gender identification, the church's daily vocabulary for preaching, worship, catechesis, and evangelization broadcasts a different message: God is male, or at least more like a man than a woman, and "he" is more fittingly addressed as male than as female.

Today, women and men in a variety of settings are questioning our exclusive reliance on male metaphors for God. In prayer and study they are rediscovering female imagery for God long hidden in Scripture and tradition. Feminist artists, poets, composers, and theologians are fashioning new images and idioms for God out of women's embodied experience. Language about God is expanding, even to the point of addressing divine mystery as "she." In this essay I would like to make a theological case for such language and argue that its development is of the highest religious significance.

The starting point for this case is a discerning attention to women's experience of themselves and of God, today occurring around the world in a new way. Struggling to reject sexism with its limits on their self-worth and self-identity, women are affirming their own identity, not as nonpersons or half persons or "deficient males," but as genuine human persons. This rebirth, moreover, brings in its wake a positive judgment about women's ways of being in the world. Female bodiliness, passion, modes of thought, love of connectedness, friendship, and a host of other historical characteristics are revalued as good rather than deficient or evil. Given the ingrained negative assessment of women's humanity under patriarchy, women's experience of themselves in this way is a powerful event, the coming into maturity of suppressed selves. In a religious sense, it is the experience of conversion of heart and mind.

*"Granted!* You're also a person!"

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Insofar as the experience of self is profoundly intertwined with the experience of God, growth or diminishment in one conditioning the other, women's awakening to their own human worth is a new event in the religious history of humankind. It occasions an experience of God as beneficent toward the female and an ally of women's flourishing. Great images of the divine, Martin Buber observed, come into being not simply as a projection of the imagination but as an awakening from the deep abyss of human existence in real encounter with divine power and glory. Images with the capacity to evoke the divine are given in encounters that, at the same time, bring persons to birth as persons, as Thou's, in reciprocal relation with the Eternal Thou. Far from being silly, superficial, or faddish, language about holy mystery in female symbol emerges gracefully, powerfully, and necessarily from women's encounter with divine presence in the depths of their own blessed selves. Women's reality forms part of the treasury of created excellences that can be used to refer to God.

Christian feminism expresses this by claiming the fullness of Christian identity for women as well as men. Women are equally created in the image and likeness of God, redeemed by Christ, graced by the Spirit, called to mission in this world, and destined for life in glory. They are, furthermore, not only *imago Dei* but also *imago Christi*, reborn through baptism into the one body of Christ and transformed into icons of Christ through the power of the Spirit. It is a mistake akin to heresy to locate the *imago Christi* in sexual similarity to the human male Jesus. Being conformed to Christ is not a sex-specific gift. It consists rather in embodying Jesus' compassionate, liberating manner of life and the paradox of his dying and rising through the power of the Spirit. Using a physical metaphor, Paul recognizes how this same Spirit shapes individuals into members of the body of Christ who, together with their head, form the whole Christ. The lives of all the baptized are so transformed into Christ's image (2 Cor. 3:18) that traditionally they have been called other Christs. The historical form of Christ may be male or female, *christa* or *christus*. Theologically the capacity of women and men to be images of Christ is identical. The recognition of women's human dignity as *imago Dei*, *imago Christi*, justifies the use of female symbols when speaking about God. Since women are theomorphic and christomorphic, their humanity offers excellent metaphors for speaking about divine mystery, who remains always ever greater.

The first step in the case for God-She has attended to the conversion experience of vast numbers of women in our day and the theological insight that sees this experience revealing new symbols and language for God. This theological case gains strength from a second step, consulting the basic resources of Scripture.

Numerous biblical texts offer potent female images of the living God: God as a woman in labor, giving birth, midwifing, nursing, and carrying a child; God as an angry mother bear robbed of her cubs; God knitting, baking, washing up, searching for her money; God as Woman Wisdom creating, ordering, and saving the world. The figure of Wisdom provides one of the earliest interpretive frameworks for Christology, Jesus even being called the Wisdom of God. In a special place is the symbol of the Spirit, God's moving presence and activity in the world, often presented in female metaphors. When Scripture is read with a feminist hermeneutic, such images provide a treasure trove of new yet ancient ways to speak about God.

For some literal-minded believers, however, the Christian community is not free to expand its language about God. They argue that Jesus himself spoke to and about God as father *('abba)* and that he taught his disciples to do likewise. Such an argument sets its sights too narrowly. Jesus' language about God, far from being exclusive, is diverse and colorful, as can be seen in the imaginative parables he created. A woman searching for her lost coin, a shepherd looking for his lost sheep, a baker-woman kneading dough, a traveling businessman, the wind that blows where it wills, the birth experience that delivers persons into new life, an employer offending workers by his generosity: Jesus used these and many other human and cosmic metaphors for divine mystery, in addition to the good and loving things that fathers do.

In the light of Jesus' own usage, the difficulty with restricting our language about God to "father" alone is readily apparent. Speech that was originally pluriform, subtle, and subversive gets pressed into an exclusive, literal, and patriarchal mold. This does not do justice to Jesus' own language nor to his understanding of God. Furthermore, it fails to examine the deleterious effect that relying almost exclusively on the father symbol has had in Christian history. Diverse images of God, including female ones, are not only plausible; they are necessary, and scripturally justifiable.

Retrieving biblical female symbols of God requires another critical move. Since even these symbols are embedded within a text, a culture, and a tradition shaped by sexism, they cannot be merely lifted and plunked down whole like the prophet Habakkuk. They must first pass through the fire of feminist hermeneutics and be used by a community struggling to be a community of the discipleship of equals. Otherwise they will remain supplementary, subordinate, and stereotyped symbols within a traditionally dualistic male-female framework.

Turning to Catholic classical theology is a third step in this argument. While limited by its androcentric anthropology, this tradition nevertheless contains salutary insights that further our case. These include God's hiddenness or incomprehensibility; the play of analogy in speech about God; and the consequent need for a plurality of ways to address God. All are positive factors that open the door to inclusive speech.

In essence, God's unlikeness to the finite world of matter and spirit is total. Human beings simply cannot understand God. No human concept, word, or image can ever circumscribe the divine reality. Nor can any human construct express with any measure of adequacy the mystery of God who is ineffable. As Augustine says, "If you have understood, then what you have understood is not God." This applies even to the language of



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revelation. Rather than remove divine mystery, the love of God poured out in Jesus Christ deepens it, moving it far beyond any philosophical notion of incomprehensibility.

Speech about God, therefore, can never be literal but is always analogical. This means that images and concepts are taken from the created world and said about God indirectly. In a threefold movement of the mind they are affirmed, negated, and reaffirmed in a transcending movement: God is good; God is not good in the limited way creatures are good; God is good in an excellent way as source of all good. Saying this, the human spirit passes from light into darkness and thence into brighter darkness, intuiting an unspeakably rich and vivifying reality while God, nonetheless, remains hidden. Words about God, therefore, point rather than enclose. As Aquinas noted, "All affirmations we can make about God are not such that our minds may rest in them, nor of such sort that we may suppose God does not transcend them."

This being so, we must use many words to speak of God. Since God created the world by giving it a share in being, every created perfection points to the One who is the source of it all. Every fragment of beauty, goodness, and truth in the human and natural world reflects the Creator. None of these alone, or even all taken together, exhausts the reality of divine mystery. But our speech about God is less inadequate the more we include a variety of created excellences as starting points.

There is always the danger of forgetting the nature of speech about the hidden God, and absolutizing particular expressions. Introducing female symbols has the effect of purifying God-talk of its direct, even if unintentional, masculine literalism. Used inclusively, these symbols create a greater sense of the mystery of God who is beyond all telling; restore our understanding of analogy; and add a wealth of created excellence from the lives of women to our storehouse of the names of God. Not only is the theological tradition open to the use of God-She, but the tradition itself is better served by doing so.

A final step in the case for female symbols of God comes when we consider the existential and practical effects of God language on the church. A faith community's imagery of God is its lodestar. This imagery helps it interpret and understand life, experience, the world. The way a faith community speaks about God indicates what it considers the highest good, the profoundest truth, the most appealing beauty. This language, in turn, molds the community's corporate identity and behavior as well as the individual self-understanding of its members.

A religion, for example, that speaks about its God as a warrior and extols the way he smashes his enemies to bits would likely promote among its adherents aggressive group behavior. On the other hand, images of a beneficent, loving God who forgives offenses have the power to turn a faith community toward care for one's neighbor and mutual forgiveness. The symbol of God functions. It is neither abstract in content nor neutral

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*"I'm a patriarch—I'm supposed to patronize you!"*

in effect, but expresses a community's bedrock convictions.

This being so, the fact that the Christian community ordinarily speaks about God in the image of a ruling man is a problematic practice. For reformist feminist theology, which includes a remarkable spectrum of diverse theological opinion, the difficulty does not lie in the fact that male metaphors are used. Men as well as women are created in the image of God and may serve as points of reference to God. The problem, however, is that these male images are used almost exclusively, which results in their being taken rather literally. Furthermore, the specific male images used reflect a patriarchal arrangement of the world, casting God into the mold of an omnipotent, even if benevolent, monarch.

This exclusivity and patriarchy are apparent in concrete images and abstract concepts. Recall Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel painting of God as an elderly, Caucasian gentleman with a flowing white beard calling into life a single younger man in "his" own image. Historically in the West, metaphysical descriptions of the divine nature and attributes have betrayed a similar bias. With implicit stress on solitariness, superiority, and omnipotent power, they present the divine mystery as an isolated, privileged male who is set off from and above others.

The exclusive use of patriarchal images and concepts of God has a two-fold negative effect. First, it reduces the divine mystery to a single, reified metaphor of a ruling male. Once reified, a symbol no longer points beyond itself to ultimate truth. Instead it becomes an idol, eclipsing the mystery of God. Second, images and concepts of God modeled exclusively on ruling men (fathers, lords, kings) support and justify the dominance of this one group over those who by sex, race, or class are not part of their privileged group. In particular they prevent women from identifying themselves as *imago Dei*, the image of God, which profoundly affects their personal and religious identity.

In sum, exclusive use of male God language is both religiously idolatrous and socially oppressive. It does damage to the truth of the living God and to the dignity of women made in her image. Given the lodestar quality of a community's image of God, it results in a community bent out of shape by the relations of patriarchy. What is at stake in this question is not only the truth about God but the identity and mission of the Christian faith community itself.

One remedy used by a number of contemporary scholars and liturgists is to speak about and address God simply as "God." This has produced some positive results but is, in the end, unsatisfactory. The persistent use of the term "God" clouds over the personal or transpersonal character of divine mystery. It hampers not only the sense of personal presence but also the insights that might occur were female symbols of God allowed to guide our thought. In a serious way it papers over an assumption that needs explicit scrutiny, namely, that women's reality is fundamentally inadequate to represent God.

I would argue, to the contrary, that women, created in the image and likeness of God, bear excellences that reflect the being of their Creator. Using female imagery of God has many advantages. It effectively points to the personal character of holy mystery. In doing so it challenges the literal-mindedness that clings to exclusively male images, thus making us mindful of the mystery of God. Demonstrating a profound respect for the humanity of women, it calls into question their marginalization within patriarchy. Finally, it suggests an understanding of community characterized by relationships of mutuality and reciprocity rather than by the sacralized dominance of one group over another.

If the experience of God in our day is summoning up female symbols; if Scripture and tradition are open to this development; and if there are negative effects from not using inclusive language and positive effects from so doing, how shall we proceed? For Christian theology, speaking about God involves reflection on the one triune God made known in creation, incarnation, and grace. Female symbols act as a corrective not only for sexist distortions of God-talk in general, but for Trinitarian symbols in particular. To wit: the Spirit is virtually forgotten in the West, being faceless, with no proper name; the Christ is distorted through assimilation to the framework of male dominance; and God's maternal relation to the world is eclipsed through concentration on the paternal metaphor: "You forgot the God who gave you birth" (Deut. 32:18).

Incorporating female patterns of speech puts all of these notions back in play. We speak about the vivifying Spirit, forever drawing near and passing by. She is the giver of life who pervades the cosmos like a mother bird hovering over the primordial chaos (Gen. 1:2). She shelters those in difficulty under the protective shadow of her wings (Ps. 17:8), and bears up the enslaved on her great wings toward freedom (Ex. 19:4). Other images deepen our understanding of the Spirit's work: like a woman she knits new life together in the womb (Ps. 139:13); like a midwife she works deftly with those in pain to bring about the new creation (Ps. 22:9-10); like a washerwoman she scrubs away at bloody stains till the people be like new (Ps. 51:7).

We can also speak about Jesus-Sophia, Wisdom made flesh in a particular history. Writing of Wisdom Augustine noted, "But she was sent in one way that she might be with human



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beings [as Spirit]; and she has been sent in another way that she herself might be a human being [as incarnate in Christ]." Not only does the use of this female symbol remove the male emphasis in Christology that so quickly turns to androcentrism, but it evokes Sophia's gracious goodness, her life-giving creativity, and her passion for justice, all key elements in understanding the person, ministry, death, and Resurrection of Jesus.

We can also speak about God as the Origin without an origin, the Mother Creator of all that is seen and unseen. Since it is women whose bodies bear, nourish, and deliver new persons into life and who, as society is traditionally structured, most often carry out the responsibility of raising children into maturity, language about God's maternity is easily assimilated. In her, as once literally in our own mother, we live and move and have our being, as some of our poets now say (*see* Acts 17:28).

We can also speak of the Trinitarian mystery itself in female images. The mystery of mutually related, radically equal "persons" in a community of diversity can be named as unoriginate Mother, her beloved Child, and the Spirit of their mutual love; or as Wisdom's self-reference, her personal Word, and her overflowing Energy, moving in an encircling embrace. This language is analogical and indirect. It depicts the threefold character of the one God hidden in the fullness of her power, eternally uttering the distinct word of herself, and pouring forth her personal love.

What is modeled in these and other such symbols is the exuberant, life-giving dignity and power of women, applied analogically to the divine persons. The eternal friendship that is the triune mystery opens to encompass the whole broken world, awakening in those who are willing the experience of her compassion and freedom. Modeling the triune symbol on relations of women's loving and speaking of it in Wisdom metaphors offers a promising antidote to the exclusive male imagery of the classical model and the hierarchic patterns of relationship that attend it.

Such symbols are but modest starting points for a more inclusive God-talk. As the history of theology shows, there is no "timeless" speech about God. Rather, symbols of God are cultural constructs, entwined with the changing cultural situation of the faith community that uses them. Developing these symbols today is a theologically central task for the whole church.

In the *Summa Theologiae* Thomas Aquinas dealt with the legitimacy of such historical development. He noted that since Scripture does not use the term "person" to refer to God, some had objected that we should not use the term either. But, Aquinas argued, "person" can be used with confidence about God since the perfections the word signifies, namely, being, intelligence, etc., are in fact frequently attributed to God in Scripture. Furthermore, if our speech about God were limited to the very terms of Scripture, we could speak about God only in the original languages of Hebrew and Greek. Aquinas defended the use of extra-biblical language on grounds of his-

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torical need: "The urgency of confuting heretics made it necessary to find new words to express the ancient faith about God." Finally, he exhorted his readers to value these new expressions: "Nor is such a kind of novelty to be shunned; since it is by no means profane, for it does not lead us astray from the sense of Scripture."

Aquinas's arguments provide a useful framework for evaluating new patterns of speaking about God in female symbols. In light of the longevity and pervasiveness of sexism in culture and religion, it is imperative to find more adequate ways of expressing the ancient good news. The present ferment about imaging, naming, and conceptualizing God in female symbols is a contemporary manifestation of the fact that, as in every epoch before us, we as a faith community are involved in an open-ended history of faith seeking understanding that is not yet finished.

No language will ever adequately encompass the unquenchable mystery toward which we make limited but necessary gestures. But the living God and the vitality of the faith community require that a more inclusive way of speaking about and to divine mystery be developed. God-She can breathe new life into religious language and symbols that bear the ancient responsibility of conveying what is most holy, loving, merciful, just, and wise. □

John Shea

## A Theologian at Prayer

O
(that is the vocative
of a cosmic disclosure)
Thou
who cannot become
an It,
Being in whom
all beings participate,
Absolute Future
who masters every present,
Origin and Destiny
of every concrescing actuality
whose Primordial Nature
cannot change
and whose Consequent Nature
cannot sit still,
Unknowable Mystery
who knows us,
Transcendent Third
in every duo,
please help me get tenure.

From *The God Who Fell from Heaven*, © 1992, by John Shea. Reprinted by permission of The Thomas More Press.

**MEDIA**

# TRULY DISHONEST

## AND JOE SIX-PACK KNOWS IT

Every spring, the nation's big advertising firms get together and have a ceremony where they hand out awards for the best radio and television commercials for that year: they're called the "Clio" Awards. Clio is the classical muse of history, or, more properly, of historiography.

Say what? Advertising, at least since the Industrial Revolution, has been generally regarded as one of the more venal, ephemeral, and sleazebag professions. We've got myths like "Perry Mason" for lawyers and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* for pols; but has anybody ever told a story about a (giggle and snort) noble adman? Shouldn't the goddess contact, say MacKenzie & Brackman, and sue for damages?

Well, maybe not. George Orwell observed that all art is propaganda, though all propaganda is not necessarily art. And the evidence is strong that writing itself developed as the most rudimentary sort of advertising. When the Sumerians and their Mesopotamian pals began to depend on big intercity trade—that is, when they became recognizably like us—they took to shipping their goods in large clay caskets. Now the problem is that once you seal a *lot* of clay caskets, you're apt to forget what's in any given one (ever put an important letter where you were sure it wouldn't get lost?). So what the priests—who were also quartermasters—did was devise some simple, universally-agreed-upon signs they could punch into the top of a casket before the clay hardened: "Wheat," "Grapes," "Ox-Jerky," and like that. Bingo! Exosomatic Memory! Writing. *History Begins at Sumer*, Samuel Noah Kramer's great 1956 book, declares. Actually, Clio is born as a label.

So, just for the hell of it, let's forget for the nonce all the two-bit moralism sociologists and other popular culture-slumming academics who like to natter about the "hidden persuaders" and "subliminal enticement" in ads. The assumption behind most of this stuff, after all, is that the vast majority of the nonacademic public doesn't *know* it's getting its chain pulled: that Joe Six-Pack and his wife Marge are too benighted to get it that Lexus and Coca-Cola and Adidas are all creating metaphors that identify the consumption of their product with sex, power, and joy, metaphors that translate elemental human *needs* into artificially targeted *wants*. That *may* have been true once; but not, I think, in the memory of any living soul. Things are more complicated: P.T. Barnum is long to his final rest.

Let's assume that Clio—history—*is* the muse of advertising, or maybe even the divine daughter ("In the beginning was the label?"), and that a given culture's advertising is in fact its larval poetry, the clearest indication of the way it manipulates its symbols to articulate its sense of life. (Not for nothing did Joyce make Leopold Bloom in *Ulysses* an advertising canvasser,



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and aha—*there's* your story of a noble adman.) Then what do our ads, our labels, have to tell us about the particular forest of symbols we inhabit?

Jean Baudrillard is a French post-Marxist deconstructionist cultural critic, and moonily admired in American graduate schools. Heroically overcoming all that, however, he is a very smart guy. And one of Brother Baudrillard's brilliant observations about postindustrial capitalism (read: us) is that it is above all the culture of the "simulacrum": the simulacrum being an infinitely replicable object *for which there is no original*. It's the kind of conceptual leap that makes everything fall into place.

As in: of the very hippest kind of baggy shirt and baggy shorts a kid can wear on the West Coast is from a company called "Big Dogs," and how you can *tell* the kid is hip is that every otherwise indistinguishable shirt from Big Dog *says* "Big Dogs" on the front and also has a picture of a—well, hell, of a Big Dog. As in: the TV ads for the Infiniti car (and *why* does misspelling a word make it more glamerus?) tend to feature a lot of shots of waves on the beach or trees in the wind and a pseudo-Zen voiceover, but not many shots of the damn *car*. As in: Madonna, who I think is some kind of genius but who, let's face it, is as close to being Marilyn Monroe as I am to being Raymond Chandler, becomes our regnant sex goddess by blatantly *impersonating* the cliché, and letting us know all along it is a cliché. Each case is, in Baudrillard's word, a simulacrum: the cuneiform on the clay casket comes to supplant whatever is "really" inside. In the arts, it's exactly what critics mean by "postmodernism": the free play of language or structure in the void of its "meaningfulness."

*"Haskins is a veteran of the cabbage patch doll wars, the lite beer wars, and the cola wars."*

Here's a poem, in its entirety, by the greatly gifted John Ashbery:

"THE CATHEDRAL IS
Slated for demolition."

It's far from silly. The energy of the poem is just in the irony sparking between the grandiose, capitalized title (with the heavyweight word, CATHEDRAL) and the bathos of the rest of the sentence, which also happens to be the whole poem. But is that a poem? Couldn't *anybody* do that? The answer—and, again, the point—is Yes. This is the reverse of surrealism, because it says that language, by itself, is such an intricate, delightful system that it can't help but produce such elegantly self-reflecting in-jokes. Writing isn't just exosomatic memory anymore: it's almost exosomatic consciousness.

Last May I was flying to Boston. The dessert of my meal tray was a frozen cup with the label "I Can't Believe It's Yogurt!"

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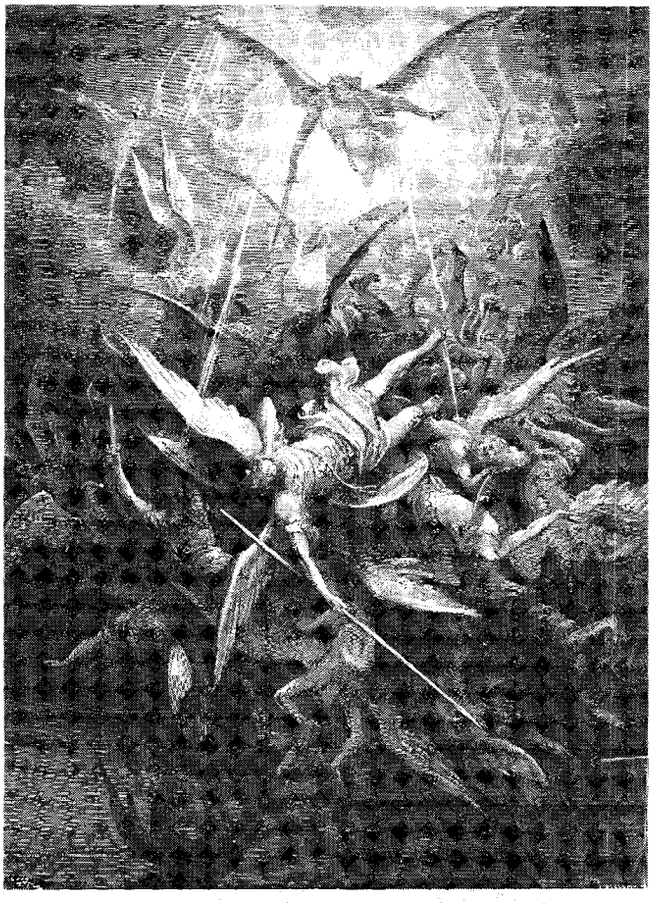

Now I'd never had frozen yogurt, but, being an adventurous kind of guy, I tried it—and it was great. I checked the ingredients: ice milk, vanilla extract, chocolate, salt, artificial coloring, and a bunch of chemicals that, I don't want to know what they are. And I got it. They call it "I Can't Believe It's Yogurt!" *because there's no damn yogurt in it.* I thought about Ashbery's poetry, Warhol's Campbell Soup paintings, the monotone operas of Philip Glass. Like Balboa staring at the Pacific, I felt, I was looking at a dazzlingly pure postmodern product. And then I had to stop mumbling, because the guy in the seat next to me was looking a little nervous.

(You can also buy, in your grocery, something called "Real Turkey Pastrami"; *nu*, the turkey, already, thinks it's pastrami? *Feh*!)

Now the self-stroking academic celebrants of the postmodern sensibility—and golly, don't I sound like Pat Buchanan?—claim that it's all a weary but wise Byzantine game played out on the edge of the abyss: forgetting, most of them, how much they sound like Oscar Wilde, Beardsley, etc. at the *fin* of the last *siècle*. I don't think they understand how pandemic that sensibility really is: that Joe and Marge Six-Pack, that all of us, live in a forest of symbols where all the trees are papier-mâché, and we all know it. The Joe Isuzu commercials of a few years back ("He's Lying!") are a cultural artifact of the deepest significance: smart as he is, Ashbery doesn't play the game one bit better than Joe and Marge.

And that's okay. I believe that history is cyclical—Clio doesn't run a race, she dances in a round—and once a Platonic Year we need a good dose of decadence, just to remind us of what its opposite is really like. (Forget the Golden Mean—hold on to the Platinum Extremes.) It is a pity, though, that just as the "postmodern sensibility"—the label-for-the-product complaisance—has been growing since the fifties, so has what can only be called massive public despair at the meaninglessness of public discourse. It isn't even, now, that we suspect that all politicians lie: now we *expect* them to, and are even a little nonplussed when we think maybe they aren't.

George Bush cynically prevaricated, and Bill Clinton uncomfortably waffled (so now you know my secret ballot, so sue me), and a gaggle of network commentators gave us instant analyses pretending that the statements just uttered were actually significant—another label-for-the-product scam—while we all trudge into the decline of the republic. That's the only problem with intellectual decadence: you admire the flames while the house burns down.

So Bush, even before the beginning of the campaign, said on network TV that he would do "whatever it takes" to get re-elected. An astonishing moment. If Roosevelt or Truman—if Nixon or Reagan—had said *that*, is it conceivable that it *wouldn't* have been a guarantee of national revulsion and inevitable defeat? But so inured are we to the elegant emptiness of discourse, private or public, that it was received with hardly more than a ripple of amusement. I Can't Believe It's Yogurt? How about I Can't Believe It's Ethics?

Sometimes, for all her sublimity, Clio weeps.

FRANK McCONNELL


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# Something fundamental is afoot

LUKE TIMOTHY JOHNSON

Almost twenty years have passed since Mary Daly's *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (1973) explicitly challenged the symbolic structure of traditional Christianity from a feminist perspective. The subsequent debate has intensified and broadened. Some feminists, like Daly herself, decided that Christianity is irrevocably committed to sexist structures, and left. Others, such as Rosemary Radford Ruether, Letty Russell, Anne Carr, and Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, have worked out a variety of options for negotiating the tension between Christian faith and feminist commitment. Rather than leave in pursuit of a more comfortable spirituality, they have accepted the uncomfortable role of the loyal opposition.

Their refusal to leave and their insistence on continuing to speak within the church has forced the recognition that feminism is something more than a temporary crisis. The feminist theological agenda, furthermore, has extended beyond the moral denunciation of sexist patterns in church and society to encompass an ever more explicit engagement with the central symbols of the Christian tradition. Alvin F. Kimel, the editor of *Speaking the Christian God*, distinguishes between "fads in theology that come and go," and this movement, which not only critiques traditional ways of thinking about God and Christ, but also "embodies this critique in very practical directives that alter the church's speech and prayer." Kimel therefore says, "A revolution is now taking place in the worship and discourse of English-speaking Christianity."

**Books discussed in this essay**

**She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse,** *Elizabeth A. Johnson, Crossroad, $24.95, 311 pp.*

**Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism,** *edited by A.F. Kimel, Jr., Eerdmans, $21.95, 337 pp.*

His assessment is neither melodramatic nor inaccurate. The debate reflected in these books has a historic dimension comparable to that involving Gnosticism in the second century C.E., for it implicates the whole range of Christian *ethos* (identity) and *praxis* (practice), as both derive from the disputed territory of Christian *logos* (speech). The outcome of this wide-ranging and sometimes acrimonious debate will affect the shape of Christianity for succeeding generations, including the ways in which the Christian community defines its sense of historical continuity.

The eighteen essays that Kimel has gathered in *Speaking the Christian God* clearly have a counterrevolutionary purpose. They are written by battle-tested veterans, virtually all of whom can cite previous and fuller studies dealing with the disputed issues. They unite in a flat rejection of the premises and conclusions of what they perceive as a radical feminism. While they reveal varying degrees of sympathy with the intellectual efforts of their opponents, they all claim a commitment to women's political and social equality. They insist, in fact, that such is demanded by the Christian *ethos*. But they emphatically reject the project of radical feminism.

But what constitutes "radical feminism" and demands its rejection by Christian theologians? It is nothing less than the application of a feminist critique to the very language about God and Christ, and, by implication, to the adequacy and authority of biblical revelation. But wait: all the way back to Elizabeth Cady Stanton there was a challenge to Paul's statement that women should be silent in the assembly (1 Cor. 14:33-36; 1 Tim. 2:11-15). How did we get to the suggestion that calling God "She" might not be a bad thing?

The authors of these essays think that the progression from the edges of social critique to the heart of Trinitarian theology was from the start implicit in the premises of feminism. Thus the global and principle-based character of their rejection. Another observer might perceive that the protest against sexist practices met such unreasonable resistance that this conclusion grew inescapable: practice could not change without a change in ideology. The true force of Daly's unforgettable aphorism became more evident: "If God is male,

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then the male is God." Whichever analysis is correct, the combatants at least agree that something fundamental is afoot.

The essays in *Speaking the Christian God* are generally civil in tone, although a polemical edge is not lacking. Only occasionally does a scarcely controlled animus disrupt the tone of reasonable discourse, and broad characterization replace analysis. This is particularly the case, unfortunately for overall impressions, with the opening and closing essays by Elizabeth Achtemeier ("Exchanging God for 'No Gods'") and Leslie Ziegler ("Christianity or Feminism").

The authors demonstrate decent acquaintance with some important primary feminist sources, although a sympathetic reading of them is rarer (mainly in the essays by Janet Soskice, J.A. DeNoiia, and Ray Anderson). The index confirms a reader's impression that although Mary Daly and Rebecca Chopp and Isabel Carter Heyward and Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza all come in for discussion or criticism, the several books of Rosemary Radford Ruether and above all Sallie McFague's *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (1987) are favorite targets.

The contributors were obviously given a free hand to shape their essays, with the result that there is considerable overlapping of themes. The authors repetitively bewail what they regard as the feminists' (especially McFague's) inadequate grasp of metaphor; they question whether there is something identifiable as "Women's Experience"; they attribute the feminist agenda to a faulty worldview, alternatively characterized as Kantian dualism, monism, projectionism, Gnosticism; they express regret at the realization that changing language about God will not get feminists "what they really want."

More substantively, the essayists frequently assert that changing language about God threatens the symbolic framework of traditional Christianity, challenges the absoluteness and authoritativeness of biblical revelation, and (most seriously) shakes the foundations of Christology. These last are indeed weighty issues, requiring of all those committed to true speaking about God and loyalty to the gift God has entrusted to the church both intense labor and great delicacy.

In fact, I share the essayists' sense of outrage at the ways in which many changes have been brought about in lectionaries (not only with respect to inclusive language!) and liturgical texts through politically correct committees, changes imposed on the people previous to the necessarily slow and patient process of education and discernment such momentous alterations demand. Precisely because, to use Elizabeth Johnson's expression, speech about God takes place "at the intersection of mighty concerns," the most exquisite loyalty, love, and delicacy must be used in its deployment, for the identity of the people as well as the truth about God is at stake. Surely we by now should be able to agree that these are not matters for lobbying and political pressure and manipulation, but matters requiring passionate and prayerful doing of the truth in love.

But although the concerns raised by the essayists are legitimate, their criticisms sometimes on target, and their anxiety about where all this will lead appropriate, this collection of essays, taken as a major statement concerning the central issues, is a disappointment. The tendency toward broad characterization (especially in terms of a supposed "worldview" intrinsically incompatible with Christianity) is a form of trivialization inappropriate to serious debate, and reflects a failure to adequately apprehend either the moral or the intellectual integrity of the feminist positions.

There is therefore an issue of moral credibility when the essayists consider it sufficient to assert in a by-the-way fashion that they are entirely in favor of "full rights for women" without acknowledging the ways in which Christianity has helped sponsor structures that have suppressed those rights. It is entirely disingenuous to defend the intention of the Scripture's language without at least confessing that in fact the *use* of that language has been abusive, even and sometimes especially by earlier staunch defenders of orthodoxy and tradition.

There is an issue of intellectual credibility when the feminist critique is posed entirely in terms of "what women want," as though it were entirely a self-serving enterprise by women "always learning [who] can never arrive at the knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim. 3:7). If feminist scholarship is heard more accurately, the issue concerns not what women want but what humanity, male and female, *needs*. And women's learning is precisely a distinctive approximation of the truth about God that enables both men and women to grow. These assertions may be right or wrong, but a response that does not acknowledge them cannot be viewed as adequate.

Lacking a generous appreciation of feminists' loyalty or goals, the essays in *Speaking the Christian God* increasingly manifest a defensive closure against dangerous "outsiders" rather than an open discussion with faithful if perhaps distanced colleagues. As a result, the very invocation of tradition as a tamper-proof product appears self-interested, and so simplistically stated as to suggest not only that God's revelation is entirely something of the past, but also comprehensively and unambiguously contained in the literal words of Scripture, creed, and liturgy. In



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less defensive a posture, one wonders how comfortable these authors would be with such an etiolated understanding of *symbolum* and *definitio*. In any case, the perception that theology has to do with the living God who continues to speak to people in their present experiences, and that theology, if it is not to fall into willful blindness, must always remain attentive to God's self-disclosure in the world, and that this self-disclosure is characteristically surprising, paradoxical, and upsetting of accustomed verities, is absent from this book. As a result, however kindly delivered, the cumulative message from these authors to "women" can be heard as "be silent, or leave."

The earlier published efforts by Elizabeth Johnson are given relatively positive notice by the essayists in *Speaking the Christian God*, which made me wish that her most recent book had been available to them. Perhaps their response would have been somewhat different, for Johnson's *She Who Is*, so far as I can tell, is the most substantial and sophisticated effort yet undertaken to connect "feminist and classical wisdom" in a synthesis at once bold and discerning, critical and doxological, at once engaged with the classical sources of Christian theology and committed to a vision of Christianity pervasively and profoundly marked by feminist values.

The peculiar power of this book may owe something to the fact that Johnson is a Roman Catholic nun. Unlike some Protestant feminists, therefore, she has survived within a communion which is still the most patriarchal in its structures and systematically repressive of women, not only in recondite matters of language, but in the specifics of practice. Johnson is therefore able to show how a "male centered Christology" shapes sexist practice by citing the egregious argument from the "Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ordained Priesthood" that men should be ordained and women not because men have a more natural resemblance to Christ than women do, an argument whose logic could be pursued so as to restrict priesthood only to sandal-wearing Jewish peasants from Galilee. Johnson's moral passion is rooted in specific experience.

But her Roman Catholicism also shows in the capaciousness of her theological vision. The essayists in *Speaking the Christian God* worried about feminists' "pantheism," but as Johnson shows, some version of that understanding of God's relation to the world underlies a great deal of the very best Roman Catholic theology of this century. The same essayists worry about the status of metaphor versus simile, but Johnson is able to delve into Augustine and Aquinas and show just how radical those pillars of the tradition were in their assertions concerning the *via negativa* and how cautious they were about the *via analogia* and how thoroughly inadequate (indeed misleading) they regarded the *via positiva* if it has not been tempered by apophatic criticism, with its emphasis on the inadequacy of our attempts to describe God. Likewise, Roman Catholic theology as it developed from Rahner into various liberation mod-


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els showed itself profoundly comfortable with the notion that the revelation of God continues in our world, and that the narratives of human experience form a legitimate basis for rereading and reinterpreting the sacred texts of the tradition. It therefore seems logical to suggest that "women's experience" also might legitimately be thought to have a certain revelatory quality if carefully discerned and interpreted.

A proper assessment of Johnson's work begins with the recognition that it is truly a theological rather than a political instrument. It is not a tract for the times but a treatise *De Deo Trino*. By no means does she consider God-talk irrelevant to practical issues. She fully subscribes to the feminist critique of sexist practices, and takes as axiomatic the feminist principle that symbols give rise to *praxis*. Thus, exclusively masculine language about God leads to and provides ideological support for patriarchal social arrangements. But her treatise does not directly address what should be done. Rather, it entertains the question of how God should be spoken. Following the lead of Paul Ricoeur's principle that "symbol gives rise to thought," she attempts to demonstrate how the use of female symbols can enrich our thinking about God.

Although clothed in extraordinarily rich and evocative language, her argument proceeds in systematic fashion. There are four parts to her exposition. Part 1 is programmatic. She places her endeavor within the "mighty concerns" of contemporary social issues as well as current feminist and theological debates. Of special importance here is her insistence that the choice now before us involves an openness to the "Glory of God" (understood in Irenaeus's terms as a "humanity fully alive") or a "scotosis" (meaning a "darkening" of the light willfully chosen). Also significant are her three choices among multiple linguistic options. She will not abandon the name "God," (to replace it with "Goddess" or "God/ess"); she chooses "female" images rather than "feminine" ones, because of the way language about "feminine/masculine" attributes tend to reinforce harmful stereotypes concerning both men and women; and, she chooses "equivalent images," rather than the replacement of male images with female ones.

The last point is of particular significance, showing the fundamentally irenic, tentative, and constructive character of her argument: "Theoretically, I endorse the ideal of language for God in male and female terms used equivalently, as well as the use of cosmic and metaphysical symbols...this book's choice to use mainly female symbolism for God, let me state clearly, is not intended as a strategy of substitution, still less of reversal. Rather it is the investigation of a suppressed world directed ultimately toward the design of a new whole."

Part 2 of her exposition examines the "resources for emancipatory speech about God," as found in women's interpreted experience, Scripture and its trajectories, and in classical theology. A word on each topic: Johnson does not suggest that women have distinctive experiential or cognitive access to God (*see* Morelli's essay in *Speaking the Christian God*) but rather that women's historical experience of the world in its specific social systems has both a positive and a negative revelatory potential. The lessons of such experience can help both men and women see how destructive purely patriarchal systems are, and can provide alternative images of social life (human and divine) predicated on solidarity and intimacy rather than on dominance. Scripture, in turn, offers far more than the occasional female metaphor or simile. Particularly in the female personification of Wisdom (*Hochma/sophia*) it provides a spectrum of specifically female images for divine activity in the world and among humans: activities of creating, sustaining, calling, teaching, inspiring, saving, judging. It is, of course, noteworthy that the most splendid examples are found in the Book of Wisdom, which Catholics recognize as canonical and Protestants do not.

Finally, the classical theological tradition, for all of its explicit marginalization of the female (her dissection of Aquinas on this point is exquisite), also offers unexpected but rich possibilities of "emancipatory discourse" about God. Here Johnson's argument exposes the implica-


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tions of apophatic theology, which insists on God's incomprehensibility. All language about God, even revealed language about God, cannot adequately comprehend the mystery which even when spoken remains ungraspable by any human mind or words. Johnson also examines the implications of analogical speech about God, especially the way in which it always presupposes a critique of positive affirmations, and always asserts the dimension of "greater dissimilarity" even as it acknowledges the possibility of "similarity" in attribute between human and divine realms. Finally, she suggests that classical theology also legitimates the use of "many names" for God, without in principle excluding the legitimacy of female names.

In my reading, this is the heart of Johnson's argument, and the element that makes her book necessary reading for anyone wishing to pursue this issue in a responsible way. Johnson has carried the discussion to the heart of the classical tradition, and suggests that the truest reading of that tradition's own principles legitimates her project. Any rebuttal of Johnson, I submit, must argue from the same ground that she has now occupied. And from that height, she asserts that language about "father and son" is neither so perspicuous nor so "proper" a language about God as (for example) the essayists of the other volume suggest.

Allow me to make the terms of the argument specific. If *female* language about God is inadequate and ambiguous and requires negative critique and the relativization by other terms, lest we think of God as "a woman," or, even worse, in terms of "nature goddesses" of ancient Near Eastern mythology, so also does *male* language about God (yes, even that spoken by Jesus) require a negative critique and relativization by other terms, lest we think of God as "a man" or even worse in terms of the barbaric war god of ancient Israelite henotheism. Johnson's argument here is compelling, and has the effect of defining its rejection as a form of "scotosis." The Nicene Creed itself shows that the biblical symbols of "Father/Son" can be misapprehended when taken literally, and require critique and correction by other terms, as it offers these qualifications: "begotten from the father before all the ages, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, one in substance with the father."

In parts 3 and 4 of her book, Johnson turns to her constructive project. She begins with "speaking about God from the world's history," which means in effect that her analysis proceeds from the "economic trinity" revealed in the human story, to language about "the trinity in itself." That procedure is also rooted in traditional theological method. What is innovative is her choice of moving from the human encounter with "Spirit/Sophia" in the world, to the specifically Christian teaching of Incarnation and Resurrection through "Jesus/Sophia," and from these to "Mother/Sophia," the originating power at work in all this mysterious self-dispo-


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sition in the world and the human story. In this section, Johnson applies her method of critique, retrieval, amplification. The brilliance of starting with the human encounter with Spirit/Wisdom, of course, is that already in the biblical tradition, this "face of God" is either genderless or female. If the reader is sufficiently bold to conceive of the "Spirit-God" in such terms, the next more difficult steps are taken more easily.

What about the key issue of the Incarnation, and the centrality of Jesus in the Christian tradition? I find Johnson's treatment to be thoroughly orthodox in substance if daring in expression. As even the authors of *Speaking the Christian God* acknowledge, the language of "sonship" is not the only appropriate language concerning Christology; biblical references to Jesus as God's "child," for example (Acts 3:13, 26; 4:17, 30), are not gender-specific. But Johnson is not interested in denying the maleness of the human Jesus. Indeed, she is attracted to the "fittingness" of his having been male, since his *kenosis* (self-emptying) thereby involves God's own critique of patriarchy: humans are saved not by a dominant distant male, but by a male who empties himself out in service and invites all to a life so defined. Johnson's argument is rather that Jesus' maleness is an accidental rather than an essential feature of Incarnation. She sees that our refusal even to *consider* that God could have become incarnate in a woman is one of the most telling symptoms of the disease the feminist critique seeks to diagnose. She argues, furthermore (surely correctly), that not the incidental facts of Jesus' life are salvific, but, as Paul argued, the fundamental pattern of obedience and love which was enacted through those specific incidents. Finally, she asserts that "Christ for us" is now no longer the historical (male) Jesus, but rather the resurrected one, the cosmic Christ whose genderless Spirit touches and transforms both female and male lives.

In the last section of her treatise, Johnson considers "the dense symbols and their dark light" of the inner life of the Triune God. It is a rich and fascinating discussion, deeply engaged not only with classical Trinitarian doctrine (especially Augustine's) but also with a variety of recent systematic theologies. By the time she comes to consider the essential life of God as "She Who Is," the reader is neither shocked nor repelled, for the precise and positive intentionality of that language has been thoroughly established. It is entirely characteristic of this work, however, that the final chapter does not consider God in splendid isolation, but returns again to the involvement of God with the human story as the "suffering God: compassion poured out."

It is obvious that I consider Johnson's book to be challenging and important. Its methodological awareness, its systematic character, its thorough engagement with the tradition, its irenic and constructive tone, its poetic and even prayerful language, all mark it as a significant advance in the debate over the appropriateness of female language about God and even the value of the feminist agenda. I do not suggest that Johnson's work is without fault. Sometimes her own language grows mushy with affect; sometimes she is so open and generous in her sensibilities that she can be challenged as uncritical concerning contemporary ethos; certainly her tendency to dismiss everything negative about women as the result of "feminization" within patriarchal structures requires close and critical examination.

But excesses and lapses are in my judgment redeemed by Johnson's two most remarkable accomplishments: she has refused to abandon or dismiss or trivialize the tradition. Instead, she has sought by a faithful yet critical reading to enrich it. And she has performed the most fundamental function of a true theologian, which is to provide a vision of God worthy of prayer. Because she has tried to find language more capacious of the many dimensions of the living God who calls us to a share in the glory which is fullness of life, and because the language she has found does not diminish but deepens our doxologies, she has provided at least this reader with an "emancipatory discourse," whose first freedom is the freedom to pray. □


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# God for us or God for God?

**GOD FOR US**
The Trinity and Christian Life
**Catherine Mowry LaCugna**
HarperCollins, $25, 434 pp.

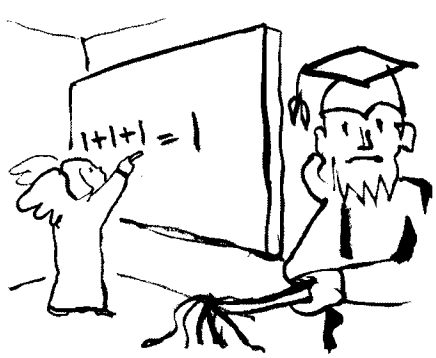
**Robert P. Imbelli**

Some months back, Robert Egan wrote an article in *Commonweal* bearing the intriguing title, "Why Theology Is Hard to Read (and Why You Should Do It Anyway)" [March 8, 1991]. I thought of Egan's article as I was preparing this review of Catherine Mowry LaCugna's theologically important, intellectually demanding, and spiritually enriching new book. Here, indeed, is a work both hard to read and, without any doubt, well worth the effort. LaCugna cares enough to think theologically and critically; and pays her readers the compliment of assuming they care enough too. She movingly reiterates Augustine's confession in the course of his own Trinitarian reflection: "nowhere else is the error more dangerous, the search more laborious, and the results more rewarding."

Not that the difficulty of the book is the result of LaCugna's style. She is usually clear, provides helpful recapitulations, rises at times to real eloquence. Rather, the issues of Trinitarian doctrine, the Christian understanding of the very nature of ultimate reality, are themselves theoretically demanding. Even more important, they are determinative of what Christians may hope for and what they are called to embody in practice. Traditionally, many of these issues have been framed in categories like "substance" and "hypostasis" now somewhat strange to us and requiring a goodly amount of historical retrieval and imagination to discern their religious and philosophical import.

LaCugna structures her book in two almost equal parts. Part 1, "The Emergence and Defeat of the Doctrine of the Trinity," sketches the New Testament's proclamation of the salvation effected by God through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit and examines subsequent theological reflection upon this "economy" of salvation, leading to the formulation of the classical doctrine of the Trinity. Insightful chapters are devoted to Arius and Athanasius, the Cappadocians and Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and Gregory Palamas: an amazing accomplishment in this age of extreme specialization. Though specialists may take issue with one or another of her historical interpretations, her undertaking is an exemplary one and provides informed discussion of the Trinitarian reflections of the authoritative teachers of the Eastern and Western church.

According to LaCugna, however, the supreme irony of this development of the classical doctrine of the Trinity was that it eventuated in the "defeat" of what it sought to preserve. She contends that there developed an increasing gap between the experiential appreciation of God's salvific action whose pattern is Trinitarian—the redemption and return of all humanity through Christ to God in the Holy Spirit (the so-called "economic Trinity")—and the theoretical positing of a separate intra-Trinitarian realm in which the divine persons dwell in sublime isolation, relating exclusively to one another (the so-called "immanent Trinity"). As I understand LaCugna, she views this development as both unwarranted and destructive. Attention shifted from experiential reflection on the mystery of God's loving action on our behalf in the economy of salvation to the abstract and conceptual problematic of how God could be both one and three in God's "inner life."




This unhappy disjunction of the Trinity of the economy of salvation, who is ever God *for us*, from the presumed immanent and self-sufficient life of God *in himself*, comprises the defeat of the original intent of the doctrine of the Trinity. The fixation upon God's "inner life," independent of creation and redemption, resulted in a loss of its power to lead into a deeper appropriation of God's ongoing transformation of humanity through Christ and in the Spirit. Hence part 2 of the book, "Re-Conceiving the Doctrine of the Trinity in Light of the Mystery of Salvation," is LaCugna's effort to repair the breach, to reknit the bonds between our experience of God's action on our behalf and our theological affirmations about the very being of God. Her ambitious attempt at Trinitarian *aggiornamento* exhibits both speculative skill and spiritual sensitivity. It is animated throughout by the sound conviction that the doctrine of the Trinity is of the utmost practical import, with clear consequences for Christian living. I shall highlight some of the strengths that characterize her "re-conception"; and then raise some questions regarding aspects of her enterprise.

LaCugna's first strength lies in her single-minded focus upon the "economy of salvation." Soteriology, reflection upon the meaning of God's salvation through Christ, and pneumatology, reflection upon the



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Spirit's ongoing transformation of humanity in the image of Christ, thus stand as the wellspring and ongoing reference for every understanding of the triune identity of God. *God for Us* is imbued with the urgency to keep the God/human relation, revealed and realized in the Trinitarian economy of salvation and confessed in the ecclesial community, as the concrete context for any further theologizing either about God or about humanity. It is charged with its author's conviction, based on the gospel, that "God's economy is not the austere distribution of meager resources but lavish grace, a glorious inheritance, bestowed in prodigal good pleasure, foreordained to be consummated." For LaCugna Christology and pneumatology must again become ingredient to Trinitarian theology, not way stations to be left behind once one has attained the speculative heights of Godhead considered in itself, as she holds classical Trinitarian teaching tended to do.

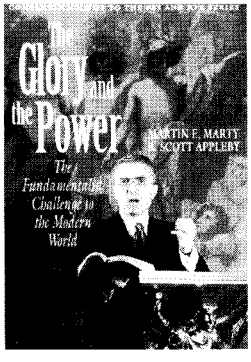
Further, and this is LaCugna's second strength, the privileged setting for such theologizing is the worship of the community, which replicates and reenacts the concrete pattern of our salvation: to the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. This doxological climate is not a decorative "add-on" to theological reflection, but the very condition of its fruitful possibility. "The worship and praise of God is the living context, the precondition even, for the theological enterprise as a whole." It is not surprising, then, to find her showing a predilection for the theology of Saint Bonaventure, as much for its spiritual affectivity as for its Trinitarian acumen. In a lovely sentence, redolent of Bonaventurean sensibility, she writes: "Praise is the creature's mode of ecstasis, its own self-transcendence, its disinclination to remain self-contained." The God who is for us is also to be worshiped for God's Self.

The third characteristic of LaCugna's work is her insistence that "relation" must serve as the key category in all reflection upon the God who saves us through Christ and in the Spirit. "Person," whether in divinity or humanity, is never self-contained, but always ecstatic, relational. And the God revealed in the ongoing economy of salvation is the tri-personal God, who calls man and woman to covenantal relation with God and with all humankind. Indeed, the purpose of God's economy of creation and redemption is to establish this all-inclusive communion of persons. Following the contemporary Greek Orthodox theologian and bishop, John Zizioulas, LaCugna holds that the Trinitarian economy of salvation makes manifest that communion of persons is the ultimate reality: that to be is to be in communion.

This summary gives but a taste of the range and richness of LaCugna's achievement. Pondering her book also raised a number of questions. Foremost among them stands the concern whether her unremitting effort to overcome the *dichotomy* between economic and immanent Trinity risks jeopardizing the *distinction* between God's salvific work for human good and the very goodness who is God and whose action in both creation and redemption proceeds from a sovereign freedom that infinitely transcends created reality.

At times LaCugna seems to be simply underscoring the fact that we are not dealing with different Gods when we speak of economic and immanent Trinity. At other times, however, the insistence is so pressed as almost to abolish the distinction. Thus she pays deserved homage to Karl Rahner for helping to revitalize Catholic Trinitarian thinking; but then criticizes him for being too tied to a "post-


"Something rare:

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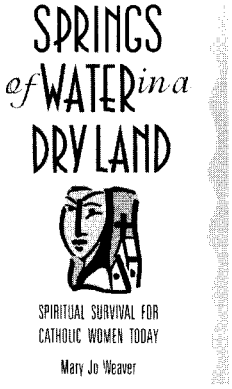


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Nicene problematic," itself in need of revision, "because of the postulation of an intradivine self-communication." Indeed, so chary is she of speaking of God's "inner life" that the impression can be unwittingly conveyed of a God who is but a function of human community.

At issue here is not whether our only *access* to the Mystery of the triune God is through the economy, the "missions" of Christ and the Spirit, sent for us and our salvation. All readily concede the point. It is, rather, whether we discern, through this Trinitarian pattern of salvation, a true apprehension of the God who, in God's own life, is communion of persons. There are pages of *God for Us* which seem to respond affirmatively and thus to transcend a Kantian restriction of our knowledge to the merely phenomenal: a position the Catholic tradition, with its critical realism, vigorously repudiates. Yet other passages hesitate and seem to lapse into a cognitive agnosticism as to whether, for example, God would be triune were there no creation. One senses in LaCugna a divided mind on the matter, with a final position still in flux and formulations not yet fixed.

Beneath the more rarified epistemological debates looms another religiously acute problem. Contrary to the post-Nicene tendency, can Christian theology legitimately attribute suffering to God? By restricting Christ's suffering to his human nature, classical theology seems to insulate divinity from the full experience of incarnation and thus not do full justice to the New Testament witness. Modern theology has, since Hegel, brought the issue to the forefront of its concerns: may God be said to be affected by the created universe to the point of, in some sense, sharing its suffering? LaCugna clearly opts for a positive response. She views the anti-Arian reaction as to some degree the triumph of a philosophical view of God's impassibility over the biblical revelation of God's cruciform love in Christ. Unfortunately, she tends here simply to affirm rather than argue the case. This is particularly disappointing in that the doxological consequences of her position alone call for a more extended elaboration.

A final question concerns the legitimacy of the post-Nicene development itself. At times LaCugna appears almost nostalgic for a pre-Nicene, indeed biblical pattern of reflection, predominantly functional in orientation. From this vantage the conciliar development smacks of a "Hellenization" of the gospel, an intrusion of an incompatible ontology. At other times the inevitability of the post-Nicene response is acknowledged, though its one-sidedness is lamented. One wonders, then, whether the book sufficiently differentiates between the *doctrine* of the Trinity, confessed by the church and constitutive of its nature, and Trinitarian *theologies*. That is: between the church's normative doctrine, whose parameters are established by conciliar definitions, and theologians' ongoing efforts to appropriate and extend our understanding of the Trinitarian faith we profess. Here again the reader encounters a certain ambiguity that reinforces one's uncertainty about the ultimate intent of the study as a whole. Did the church's doctrine of the Trinity meet "defeat"; or did theological reflection and pastoral discernment fail to realize the doctrine's rad-


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ical implications?

I am conscious that the questions and issues I have raised are replete with "seems" and "appears." Perhaps this bespeaks the fact that serious theology is indeed hard to read, even for full-time theologians! LaCugna's book is serious theology and very worth the wrestling. Her book will serve as an indispensable reference for future efforts to explore the reality of God for us: the blessed Trinity. ❑

# π = GOD?

**PI IN THE SKY**
Counting, Thinking, and Being
**John D. Barrow**
Oxford University Press, $25, 317 pp.

**Chet Raymo**

The modern world began when Galileo rolled a polished metal ball down an inclined plane. He measured the distances the ball traveled in successive equal intervals of time and found that they increased as the odd numbers beginning with unity: 1, 3, 5, etc. This observation filled Galileo with wonder and delight. His conclusion: The book of nature is written in the language of mathematics.

Today, our most secure knowledge of the world is mathematical. Indeed, it can be said that nonmathematical knowledge is held suspect by scientists. This dependence upon numbers as the guarantors of truth defines the modern, Western way of knowing. It is the source of our power, our hegemony, and our hubris.

There is no greater mystery than this—the efficacy of mathematics as mediator between mind and nature. What we take to be fundamental laws of nature are expressed in simple mathematical form. Nothing in the world eludes mathematical expression. Why? It is the fundamental epistemological question.

John D. Barrow, a professor of astronomy at the University of Sussex in Britain and an accomplished science writer, takes up the question in his latest book, *Pi in the Sky: Counting, Thinking, and Being*. Several possible answers suggest themselves: (a) Mathematics is a human invention, like the English language or the game of chess, which has proven particularly useful as a tool for learning about the world; (b) the universe is intrinsically mathematical and we learn mathematical thinking by studying the world; or (c) mathematics exists as a kind of Platonic ideal, outside of nature, and reality, including the human mind, participates in this preexisting order.

Barrow does not choose any one of these alternatives. Indeed, his inability to choose is the point of his book. Although mathematics is the foundation of our scientific image of the world, neither mathematicians nor scientists understand what mathematics is or why it works. At root, our faith in science is religious, says Barrow, and discussions of the nature of mathematics bear striking similarities to traditional theological discourse: "Change 'mathematics' to 'God' and little else might seem to change."

*Pi in the Sky* is really two books: a provocative history of mathematics, and a philosophical reflection upon the nature of truth. Of course, the two themes are intertwined, as they should be. Certain readers may be impatient to get to the juicy philosophical questions, and skip the demanding chapters on the anthropology of numbers, but that would be a mistake. It is precisely the way this book approaches philosophy (and theology) by counting on the fingers that gives its conclusions weight.

This reviewer is inclined to believe that any theology relevant to the late-twentieth century must begin with mathematics. This idea may sound shocking, even blasphemous to many theologians. Orthodox



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theology remains grounded in nonmathematical, pre-Galilean cosmology. The Chain of Being that worked so well as a framework for theological discourse in medieval times has no relevance in modern science, yet theologians cling to the old metaphors with a perverse fervor. For all of their efforts to sound up-to-date, theologians still basically offer us the God of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling, a gray-bearded version of ourselves ensconced in some heaven up there in the sky.

What's up there in the sky is pi, says Barrow; that is to say, it is mathematics that provides the mysterious link between the human mind and the cosmos. Physicists investigate the creation (the big bang) with the mathematics of relativity and quantum physics. Biologists study the genetic code as a kind of counting. Neuroscientists and artificial intelligence researchers construct mathematical models of consciousness. They do it because "it works"; the mathematical way of knowing has proven overwhelmingly successful.

The human mind evolved in response to the world in which we live, in the same way as our senses of sight, hearing, and smell. If we are mathematical creatures, it is because the world is in some deeply mysterious sense mathematical. Call it, if you will, the mind of God. The phrase is metaphorical, but so is every other definition of God. This particular metaphor emphasizes the mysterious capacity of the human mind to build mental images of external realities. As a metaphor for God, mathematics is more compatible with the substance and spirit of modern science than is the gray-bearded person of medieval theology.

Consider the following passage which stands as the conclusion of Barrow's book:

> Many see the mathematics and the scientific edifice that is built upon it as the antithesis of traditional immaterial conceptions of reality. Yet at root they are strikingly similar in the tantalizing nature of their incompleteness. And this is why we find the Platonic world [of mathematics] so strangely attractive—we have been there before. Our ability to create and apprehend mathematical structures in the world is merely a consequence of our own oneness with the world. We are the children as well as the mothers of invention.

If I were a theologian, this is where I would begin constructing my concept of God. Through mathematical thought we have come to know the big bang, the universe of the galaxies, and unfolding infinities of space and time. Through math we have plunged into the heart of matter, and explored mysteries of life and mind. We ourselves are mathematics incarnate—to the cores of our beings. It requires but a simple step to imagine that mathematics allows us a glimpse of the eternal, omnipresent, creative foundation of the world.

I'm not a theologian, but I know a ripping good mystery when I see one. John D. Barrow's book is an excellent approach to the mystery. It is hard to imagine any mystery more likely to provide a bridge across the chasm that has separated science and theology since the time of Galileo. Let the theologians take up where Barrow leaves off. □


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# A FIELD GUIDE TO BISHOP WATCHING

**A FLOCK OF SHEPHERDS**
The National Conference of Catholic Bishops
**Thomas J. Reese, S.J.**
Sheed & Ward, $19.95, 406 pp.

**Timothy A. Byrnes**

Every once in a while, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) lands on the front pages of the nation's newspapers. It happened again this past fall when the bishops decided to abandon their long awaited pastoral letter on the role of women in the church and society. Reporters descended on the bishops' annual meeting and tried to make sense of the NCCB's procedures and of the reasons for the letter's demise. As often happens in such cases, accounts of the bishops' actions raised as many questions as they answered.

What exactly is the National Conference of Catholic Bishops? Does it speak "authoritatively" for the American Catholic church? What is the relationship between the conference and the Vatican? Who are the major powers in the American hierarchy? Do the bishops direct their own conference or are they manipulated by backroom staffers? With the publication of Thomas J. Reese's *A Flock of Shepherds: The National Conference of Catholic Bishops*, questions such as these should be a thing of the past. The next time a reporter wants to understand what the NCCB is and how it operates, all that reporter has to do is read Reese's exhaustive examination.

It is all here in vivid, human detail. The process through which bishops are selected; the origins and development of the national conference; the backgrounds and styles of the conference's various leaders; the structure and governing principles of the conference itself; the role and influence of the bishops' national staff; the bishops' participation in national secular politics; the complex relationship between the NCCB and the pope; and, last but certainly not least, the conference's finances. Just as a skilled biographer brings a human subject to life, Reese has breathed life into the bishops' conference through his remarkable attention to detail and his eye for the role that personality and human interaction play in the life of the church.

A couple of sections of the book are particularly illuminating. In one chapter, Reese discusses the complex and often misunderstood relationship between individual bishops and the national conference. He captures the flavor of that relationship by emphasizing the preeminence of the local bishop in an individual diocese while at the same time reproducing a list of fifty-three canons, or church laws, that either cite the role of, or grant authority to, national episcopal conferences. Reese also devotes an appropriate amount of attention to the role the Vatican plays in shaping the style and direction of the American hierarchy. "The bishops are very reluctant to appear in conflict with Rome," he points out in an understatement. The American bishops simply cannot be understood without reference to their fundamental loyalty to "the bishop of Rome."

Sometimes Reese emphasizes factual detail at the expense of analysis and argument. He devotes about the same amount of attention, for example, to the fact that leadership positions within the American hierarchy tend to be held by bishops from the Midwest as he does to the crucial international debate over the worth and ecclesiastical significance of national episcopal conferences. And for my tastes, at least, some of the conflicts and divisions within the conference, divisions out of which many of the bishops' most controversial actions have been derived,


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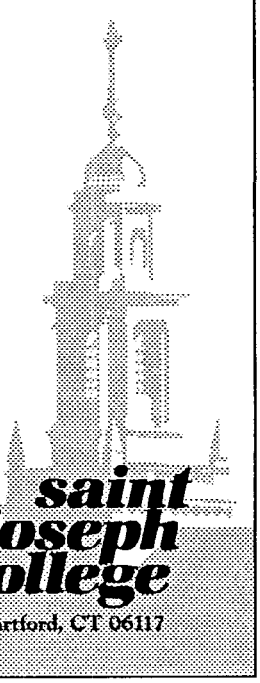

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could have been treated more critically. Reese discusses these conflicts, but he does not always lay out their consequences. Reese's interests are fundamentally organizational, and I suspect he is content to leave some of these matters of theological and political dispute to others.

These reservations, however, do not detract from the book's tremendous value for anyone interested in the American Catholic church. There is no other book on the American hierarchy like *A Flock of Shepherds*. In the style of his earlier work on American archbishops, this is a definitive account of *what* the bishops' conference is and *how* it operates. □

## OPPORTUNITIES MISSED

**JUDAISM**
Between Yesterday and Today
**Hans Küng**
Crossroad, $39.95, 753 pp.

**Eugene Fisher & Jack Bemporad**

When a scholar of great stature enters a new, albeit related field of endeavor to his own, it is an event of significance for both his usual followers and those in the field itself. For the potential for creative insights is great. So it is with anticipation that one approaches Küng's monumental volume on Judaism and Jewish-Christian relations. Küng attempts here a critical survey of all of Jewish history and thought, as well as an analysis of and major contribution to the present historic dialogue between Christians and Jews.

As he notes in his introduction, Küng utilizes "paradigm theory" as a means of organizing the enormous body of literature and history with which he deals. Similarly, he states in the same context, "for the first time in my books of this length I have taken care to make use of additional *teaching aids* (such as charts and graphs)...to make it easier to grasp the composition and conception of this long and multi-level book." There are, then, methodological innovations in the text that will be of interest to scholars.

The volume is divided into three general sections. The first, the "Past," describes Jewish history and literature from its ancient "Tribal" and "Kingdom" paradigms to what Küng surprisingly believes is Judaism's "modern paradigm"—"assimilation," symbolized for Küng by Moses Mendelssohn, whose descendants converted to Christianity. The second major section, the "Present," deals with such matters as Christian guilt for the Holocaust; Zionism; Jewish-Christian "disputes" (e.g., Jesus as historical figure and as Messiah; what caused the split between Jews and Christians; "self-criticism" of each tradition in the light of the other); and the ways in which selected modern Jewish thinkers have sought to confront modernity (Abraham Heschel, Joseph Soloveitchik, Abraham Geiger, Louis Jacobs, Zacharias Frankel, and Mordecai Kaplan).

In the third section, Küng offers future "possibilities," beginning with "postmodern" Judaism and what he feels is its unresolved "conflict" between "life" and "law." Here, he invokes especially Martin Buber, Yeshayahu Leibowitz, Judith Plaskow, and Eugene Borowitz, leading up to a discussion of "Paul against the Law?" and "The Future of the People of God."

After a lengthy political excursus on the Middle East conflict, a discussion already dated by the defeat of the Likud in the 1992 Israeli elections, Küng briefly ponders Holocaust theology and Jewish and Christian theology "after Auschwitz," using a single lecture given by Hans Jonas in Tubingen as a virtual foil over against which to show his own theories of creation and theodicy. Both the subject and Professor Jonas deserve more thorough treatment than Küng here allows.


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The volume concludes with an epilogue titled, "No New World Order without a New World Ethic." While the lesson offered here is potentially important, its presentation is again dated, this time by the author's reliance on the 1991 Gulf War as its guiding paradigm. In retrospect, the Gulf War has assumed less awesome significance than Küng accorded it at the time.

As the reader is doubtlessly beginning to suspect by this point, the present reviewers came away from this volume with a feeling of being let down by its eminent author. While the volume's heft and voluminous academic apparatus give it the appearance of a major work, we cannot recommend it even as a popular introduction to the several fields that it undertakes to survey, much less a useful scholarly one for professionals in those fields. Pondering why this is so has led us to the following reflections.

First, Küng's aim may simply have exceeded his reach. A clue to this can be seen in the schema we outlined above. In the first section, for example, he attempts in a bare two hundred pages to summarize virtually *all* of Jewish history since Abraham, adjudicating in the process innumerable highly complex textual and historical questions that have consumed generations of scholarly endeavors. While one may impute the failure of the resulting presentation to limitations inherent in the "paradigm theory," his "Notes," for all their length, reveal a critical thinness of research.

On numerous topics where entire literatures exist in creative tension and debate, Küng tends to rely on one or two volumes, seldom explaining why he has chosen one particular school over another, or, in some cases, even indicating the existence of multiple alternative views. One example: the contention that "the" synagogue formally "excommunicated" Jewish Christians. Küng represents this alleged expulsion as a historical given, going on to editorialize that "the excommunication of Christians by Jews preceded the persecution of Jews by Christians." In fact, however, the excommunication claim is highly controversial in current scholarship. And, ironically, the sole article cited by Küng to support his claim was actually written to *refute* it.

Second, the amount of attention Küng is able to give to many of the complex issues he raises is simply not adequate to enable him, even with the creative use of charts and lists, to do justice to them. Twenty-five pages, for example, is not sufficient to present (and sit in judgment upon) the entire history of the Zionist movement. One hundred pages provide minimal scope in which to treat the intricacies of Hebrew biblical history. Three pages are not adequate to define the issue of Paul and the Law. And, certainly, three sentences are not sufficient discussion to preclude the Jewish people from using their own Hebrew term, *Shoah*, for what happened to them in World War II.

This last example brings us to our third and most delicate reflection. It is the tone of the volume. We have talked now with several Jewish scholars who have read the volume and all have had a similar reaction. First comes a sense of puzzlement. Why does the author appear so negative toward Judaism? So judgmental? Examples abound. Modern Jewish Orthodoxy is written off as "Pharisaic-Talmudic...faithfulness to the letter," while Reform is reduced to "the assimilation paradigm." Jews are accused of a lack of "readiness for forgiveness" after the Holocaust, the latter in direct contrast with Christian forgiveness in the Sermon on the Mount. And what is one to say of Küng's affirmation that "contrasts between Jesus and Pharisaism...led to Jesus' arrest and death" or his reduction of Rabbinic Judaism to "casuistic trivialization" and the "purely formal aspect of the practice of the law," in which there was "no freedom for open criticism of the Torah" (presumably oral as well as written)?

Such examples of needlessly harsh rhetoric sadly are not rare in this volume. At some risk of being considered insufficiently respectful of Küng's well-established reputation, we must report that Jewish readers—with good cause—are likely to find this volume, which purports after all to present *their* faith and *their* traditions, to be insensitive and inaccurate. However well-intentioned the author was in taking up this study and however excellent some individual sections may be, the final product as a whole does not live up to its promise. □


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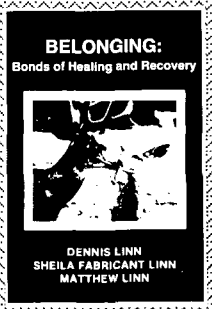


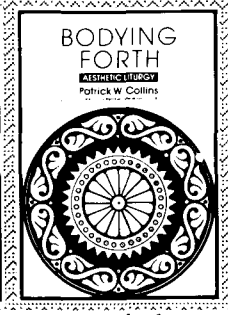


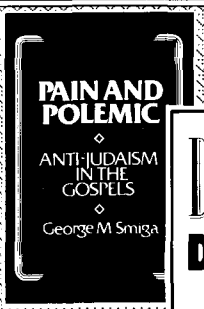


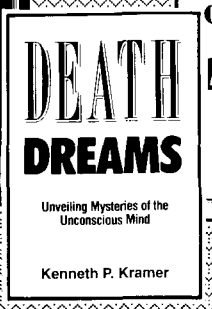


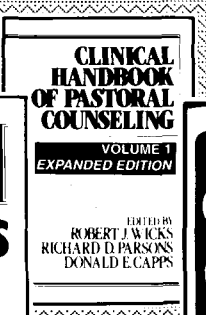


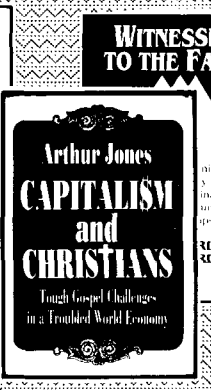


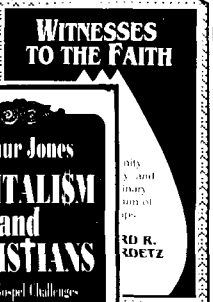


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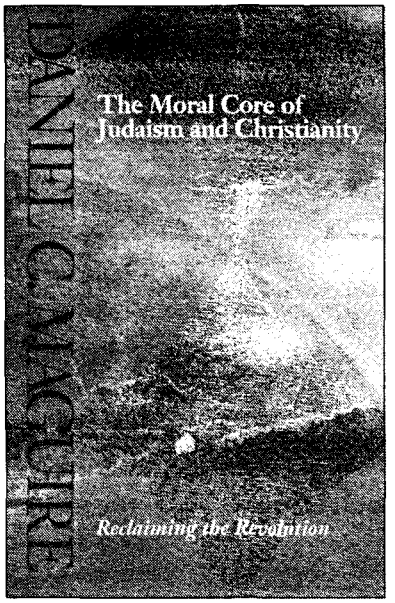


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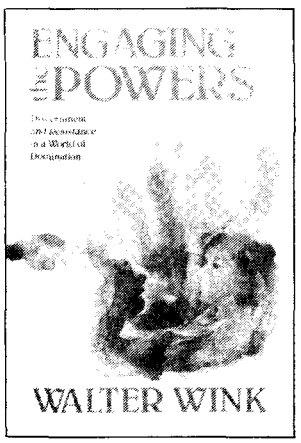


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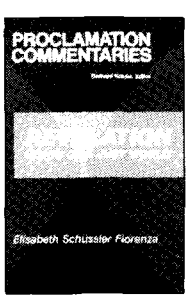


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